
R I C O C H E T S

Miniature Tales of Human Life

ANDRÉ MAUROIS

Translated by
HAMISH MILES



CASELL

and Company, Limited

London, Toronto, Melbourne
and Sydney

First published 1934

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY THE EDINBURGH PRESS, EDINBURGH
F4^o 934

CONTENTS

Morality, Public and Private 7

Letters 12

The Postcard 15

The House 19

The Green Belt 23

The Ants 29

Black Masks 31

Irene 36

The Cathedral 41

Honour 44

Kate 49

Ricochets 53

The Debutante 57

The Great Mistake 61

The Will 65

The Brown Cape 73

The Hand 78

Poor Mamma 80

These Poor Jews 85

Contents

<i>Louisa, Lady Whitney</i>	92
<i>Switchback Railway</i>	111
<i>Poor Henriette</i>	118
<i>The Cuckoo Clock</i>	124
<i>An Energetic Chin</i>	133
<i>A Misunderstanding</i>	143

MORALITY, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

AUGUST, 1914: the hateful days when every foreigner seemed a spy, when aged governesses who had lived in the same country family for thirty years suddenly blossomed into dangerous agents of the Wilhelmstrasse or the Quai d'Orsay, when dancing-teachers were suspected of preparing cavalry billets, when tennis-courts in country-house gardens barely concealed heavy gun-emplacements, when the police of every country in Europe, respecting neither sex nor condition or profession, thrust into barbed-wired and bayonet-guarded concentration camps every human being guilty of having been born on the other side of a frontier.

Thus it befell that Siegmund Kreutzberger, philosopher and man of letters, found himself one morning arrested in his little room in Montparnasse and taken off to the camp of Fontenay-le-Roi. Siegmund Kreutzberger was a German. As a matter of fact, he had left Germany at the age of two months and spent his life in Holland, England, and France; but these facts were not set forth on his passport.

The camp of Fontenay consisted of a few wooden

Ricochets

sheds with corrugated-iron roofs erected on a damp meadow. It was a graceless spot, but not repellent. Its twenty guards were commanded by a local grocer, a kindly fellow who was kept in the town by the claims of his business. Here were confined two hundred Germans, Austrians, Czechs, Hungarians, Jews—men, women, and children. They were forbidden to leave it; but otherwise they were free to live as they pleased.

The mode of life chosen by these prisoners was deplorable, but not inexcusable. They received no news of those whom they had loved or looked up to before August 2nd, 1914. Their links with the outside world and organized society were severed. And soon their own civilization was crumbling too.

It was an extraordinary adventure. On the first day they treated one another with politeness. They strove to organize communal life with decency. Couples were isolated by screens and boarded partitions. The women had a reserved hut. In a few weeks courtesy and decency had been worn thin by boredom and impunity. Promiscuity bred hatred. They all loathed the sounds of other bodies, the frowsty atmosphere, the snoring, the smells, the love-making. The screens shielded eyes only. Ears were offended by gasps and creakings. Women,

exultant in pleasure, cried aloud. At the beginning of August two hundred persons had entered the camp of Fontenay, hypocritical, and therefore respectable and humane. After a fortnight their life was that of a kennel, and the wisest were learning that institutions and virtues form but a thin, brittle crust over an inner cauldron of seething brute passions.

Kreutzberger, and a few friends attracted by his kindly ways and sober judgment, viewed with concern a tide of barbarism which might easily reach the flood-level of criminality. But they felt impotent. Advice and speeches were of no avail. Force was on the other side. They would have felt it shameful to appeal to their gaolers. At last one scandal more outrageous than most forced them to action.

At first none of his companions could understand why Siegmund Kreutzberger, a man devoid of ambition and apparently anxious only to keep his time free for meditation, solemnly implored them to set up a Committee, and had himself appointed Chairman. They were surprised and sceptically amused to see him, helped by one Hungarian and one Jew, carrying a deal table into a corner, obtaining a strip of green baize from the French terri-

torials, and pasting up on the walls of every hut small hand-written notices which announced that the Committee would consider applications and suggestions, daily from two to four o'clock.

There were many who vowed that never would the Committee have anything to do with them. They vowed in vain. What is there to do in a camp? There stood the table; there waited the Chairman, sitting behind his green cloth, solemn and welcoming. The women longed to talk, to make confessions, to be reassured. First one woman came. Then a whole procession. The visitors sat down facing him, saw his kind blue eyes and unkempt grey beard, and embarked on whispered confidences.

Soon the judge was giving sentences. The trouble was how to carry them out. He had neither laws nor policemen to hand. The condemned parties were inclined to rebel and scoff. Kreutzberger had a fresh inspiration. He obtained the Commandant's authorization to have several hundred sheets of paper printed at Fontenay, with the heading in capitals:

PRISONERS' CAMP, FONTENAY

CHAIRMAN OF ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE

Morality, Public and Private

Having received these sheets, he used them to notify his decisions to the persons concerned. He then started a file for each single inmate of the camp, entering up notes, evidence, complaints, replies to complaints. Multi-coloured folders accumulated on the deal shelves nailed up behind his table by the Hungarian carpenter. He had won the game. From that moment, Law and Virtue, the daughters of Ritual in every land, resumed some sway in this desert isle. And Siegmund Kreutzberger determined that, if he survived the War, he would compile a great treatise on Ceremonial, without which mankind would not exist.

LETTERS

FIVE years ago (she said), I was Pradier's mistress. I was terribly in love with him. He fills a woman's life with such turbulence, gives her such heights and depths, that no woman who has tasted the poison can do without it. To prove his own power to himself, he used to force me to harsh, unreasonable disciplines; and I obeyed gladly. He used to telephone to me every morning about six o'clock. At that hour my husband was still asleep, and could not hear the bell from his room: besides, I had muffled it by wedging a little cotton-wool under the hammer.

After a few months the liaison got talked about. My parents-in-law drove my husband, who adored me, to threats of divorce, and in the end, for my children's sake, I agreed to break things off. I promised to see no more of my lover. For a couple of years I thought I should die. Pradier did all he could to catch hold of me again; I left France; I kept my address secret. And at last, feeling my strength return, I came back. During my travels I had been reconciled to my husband, who proved fond and indulgent towards me.

Letters

He said not a word of this adventure, and we were reputed to be a happy couple. But I was wretched; my life seemed purposeless; I wished I could grow old. And so two more years went by.

One morning, lying asleep, I dreamt that I heard the telephone. I dreamt that Pradier was ringing me, that I could hear those rushing, passionate phrases which had conquered me. I woke up. The telephone really was ringing beside my bed. I lifted the receiver, and heard a voice. It seemed to be reciting rather than speaking. Apparently it was Pradier, but I couldn't grasp what he was saying. In a moment or two I realized that he was reading. And he was reading something very beautiful: the letters of a woman in love. They struck me as heartrending, sublime. I thought of Julie de Lespinasse, of the Portuguese Nun. At last, at one surpassingly lovely phrase, I exclaimed:

"Pradier! Please, oh please . . . stop! You're hurting me! What's that you're reading?"

"Stop?" he said. . . . "Why? I'm reading you your own letters, the ones you wrote me long ago. . . . Don't you recognize your own thoughts any more?"

Ricochets

And then I felt how different a woman, and how commonplace, two years of a tranquil heart had made me.

Next morning I visited him again. Now I see him every day.

THE POSTCARD

I WAS four years old (said Nathalie) when my mother left my father and married that handsome German. I was very fond of my Papa, but he was weak and docile, and did not insist on keeping me in Moscow. Before very long I was admiring my step-father in spite of myself. He showed me affection. I refused to call him "Father," and in the end it was agreed that to me he should be "Heinrich" as he was to my mother.

We stayed in Leipzig for three years, and then Mamma had to return to Moscow to settle some business. She telephoned to my father, conversing quite cordially with him, and promised that I should be sent to spend a day with him. I was excited, not only at seeing him again, but also at returning to the house where I had so often played, and of which I cherished wonderful memories.

Nor was I disappointed. The liveried gate-keeper, the great snow-covered courtyard, matched the pictures of my memory. And my father had taken immense pains to make it all a perfect day. He had bought new toys, ordered a wonderful

Ricochets

Heinrich was watching me, and leaned over her with a look of annoyance:

"Come, come," he murmured, "not in front of her."

He took the card from my mother's hand, smilingly admired the tinsel snow, worked the sledge on its slide, and said:

"It's the prettiest card I've ever seen. You must keep it carefully."

I was just seven, but I knew that he was lying, that, like Mamma, he thought my card dreadful, that they were both right, and that Heinrich, from compassion, wanted to shield my poor father.

I tore up the card; and from that day on I hated my step-father.

THE HOUSE

TWO years ago (she said), when I was so ill, I noticed that I was having the same dream every night. I was walking in the country, and from a long way off I saw a long, low, white house framed in a clump of lime-trees. To the left of the house the symmetry of the setting was pleasantly broken by a meadow bordered with poplars, and the line of these trees, visible from afar, swayed above the limes.

In my dream I was attracted by that house, and walked over towards it. The entrance was barred by a white gate. After that one followed a gracefully curving avenue, lined with trees round which I found spring flowers—primroses, periwinkles and anemones, which faded as soon as I picked them. Coming out from this avenue, one found oneself a few yards from the house, in front of which stretched a wide paddock, close-cut like an English lawn, and almost bare, with only a string of violets running across it.

The house was built of white stone and had a slate roof. The door, of light oak with carved panels, was at the top of a small flight of steps.

Ricochets

I wanted to visit the house, but nobody answered my ringing. I was sorely disappointed; I rang, I called out, and in the end woke up.

That was my dream; and month after month it recurred, with such constant precision that in the end I came to believe that since childhood I had really known that park and house. Yet in a waking state I could not recall the memory, and the search for it became so strong an obsession with me that one summer, having learned to drive a small car by myself, I decided to spend my holiday on the roads of France, seeking the house of my dream.

I shan't recount all my wanderings. I explored Normandy, Touraine, and Poitou; I found nothing, not to my surprise. In October I returned to Paris, and throughout the winter I still kept on dreaming of the white house. Last spring I started again on my expeditions, in the neighbourhood of Paris. One day as I was going through a valley near l'Isle-Adam, I suddenly felt a pleasant shock, that curious sensation which one feels on recognizing, after long absence, people or places one is fond of.

Although I had never been in the district before, I could recognize perfectly the country stretching away to my left.

Tall rows of poplars-dominated a clump of lime-

The House

trees, and through the first thin foliage of the latter a house was just discernible. I was sure then that I had found my dream-house. I was aware that a narrow track would join the road a hundred yards further on. And there it was. I took it, and it brought me to a white gate.

From that started the avenue which I had so often followed. Under the trees I admired the soft-coloured carpet of periwinkles and primroses and anemones. When I emerged from the overarching limes I saw the green stretch of grass, and the little flight of steps leading up to the light oak door. I got out of the car, ran up the steps, and rang the bell.

I was very much afraid that there would be no response, but almost at once a servant appeared—a sad-faced man, very old, wearing a black jacket. He seemed very much surprised at the sight of me, and looked at me closely without speaking.

“I am going to ask a strange favour of you,” I said. “I do not know the owners of this house, but I should be very happy if they could allow me to go over it.”

“The house is to let, madam,” he said, with a touch of regret, “and I am here to show people over it.”

Ricochets

"To let!" I said. "What a lucky chance! Why don't the owners live in such a delightful house?"

"They did live here, madam. But they left it when they found the house haunted."

"Haunted! But that wouldn't stop me! I didn't know that people still believed in ghosts in the country. . . ."

"I should not believe in them myself, madam," he said gravely, "if I had not often met the phantom which chased away my master, in the park, at night."

"What a story!" I said, trying to smile.

"Not a story that you should laugh at, madam," he said, "for that phantom was *you*."

THE GREEN BELT

“BERTRAND,” said Isabelle, “could you manage to be home at tea-time this afternoon? I do wish you could. I’m expecting poor Nathalie, and it’s rather distressing for me to entertain her by myself. Besides, she said in her letter she would like your advice about something.”

He glanced at his engagement-book with a gesture of annoyance.

“It’ll upset all my plans,” he said.

“I quite understand, Bertrand, and I apologize for insisting, but really I dread this meeting more than you can imagine. . . . We haven’t seen Nathalie since her husband died, and how she has survived all she has been through I can’t conceive. That mental collapse, that drama . . . ruin and shame. . . . Too much for one human being. . . . There’s no human consolation left to offer—frankly, I don’t know what to say to her.”

“Nor do I,” he said. “Don’t you think the best course in such cases is to say very little? I suppose she’ll cry when she sees you . . . and you’ll cry too. Then take her in your arms; kiss her; just let instinct guide you. . . .”

And he added, after a moment:

"I quite realize how painful the scene will be for you. I'll arrange to get back."

That evening, a few minutes before the appointed hour, he came into Isabelle's little room.

"I'm nervous," she said. "I've been trying to read, but I can't think of anything but that poor creature. . . . I keep watching that door, which I know she'll come in by, and I can't find any words. It's dreadful!"

"Keep calm," he said. "One should never prepare oneself for difficult situations. The body improvises at the moment for action. . . . Have you ordered tea?"

"Yes, I told them to bring it in five minutes after she arrives. I hope Maria's entry will interrupt the first sobs and make talking easier."

Bertrand picked up a book and opened it, then closed it with a sigh. A short, diffident ring of the bell broke the silence. Isabelle rose.

"That's Nathalie," she said.

"Stay in your chair," Bertrand implored her.

They heard a clear voice in the hall.

"How nice and warm! I shall take off my coat."

The door opened. Nathalie stood in the doorway, her pretty face a little thinner and paler, but scarcely altered and very young.

"How are you?" she said. "Oh, Bertrand, how nice! I didn't dare to hope you would have time to see me. . . . How cosy you are in here; Isabelle!"

• • • • •

An hour later, when Bertrand returned to the room after seeing their visitor out, Isabelle burst out:

"It's incredible! Don't you think so, dear? And to think that I was trembling at the idea of seeing her again. . . . Did she say one word about her disasters?"

"Vague allusions," said Bertrand. "Occasionally she dropped a remark about 'in my position.' But nothing really direct. But what I don't understand is why she wanted me to be here. . . . Did you say she wanted my advice? She didn't ask me anything at all."

"That's not my fault, Bertrand. I gave you her message exactly. . . . I can't get over it! Did you ever see anything like it? That endless dissertation on puffed sleeves. . . . By the way, do

you really like them, sleeves like hers? I thought you only approved of dresses that follow the lines of the figure?"

"Certainly," said Bertrand, "but one had to say something."

"Twice I tried to say something about her husband," said Isabelle, "but each time she slipped away with a very chilly remark, and went back to this idea of a trip to Greece, a cruise, the cabin she had set her heart on. . . . Really, she never loved him."

"Who knows?" said Bertrand.

"And what about her children? Did you hear what she said when I suggested that they would be a comfort to her? 'Do you think so?' she said. 'Do you like children? I don't. I go into their room, and if they're busy playing they don't even notice me. It's rather saddening.' I couldn't think what to reply. On the other hand, she was obstinate about your last book."

"That's no crime," said Bertrand. "Obviously she had read it properly."

"That's just what I can't forgive in her," said Isabelle. "How can people read properly when they should be in despair? And besides, after all, that green belt! Did you notice?"

The Green Belt

"Yes," said Bertrand. "It *was* rather pretty, the touch of bright colour on all that black."

"Pretty! Oh, Bertrand! It may be, but shocking too! Only three months ago she lost her husband, in tragic circumstances, and she's not even in full mourning. . . . Oh, you don't attach much importance to those details, I know. Nor do I. But after all, there are limits. . . . That emerald green belt. . . . Really, I couldn't take my eyes off it."

"Poor Isabelle," said Bertrand, taking her arm. "Haven't you worried yourself enough over poor Nathalie?"

"She hardly deserved it. . . . And the amount she ate! At first I hardly dared to offer her a cup of tea. But she kept on taking everything—bread-and-butter, cake. . . . 'Your pimento sandwiches are marvellous,' she said. And I simply couldn't answer a word."

Bertrand burst out laughing.

"Well, who would think that I found you almost in tears this morning on her account? Or that you were trembling like a leaf when you were waiting for her? You see I'm quite right in maintaining that one should never think about what lies ahead of one. Things always

Ricochets

turn out differently from what we imagine—and simpler.”

A few days later they learned that Nathalie had swallowed three tubes of veronal, and was dead.

THE ANTS

BETWEEN two sheets of glass, fastened together by strips of gummed paper along the edges, a colony of tiny brown monsters was toiling and moiling. The shopkeeper had provided the ants with a little sand, in which they had made converging passages. Right in the middle could be seen a larger creature, nearly always motionless. This was the Queen, to whom the ants respectfully brought nourishment.

"No trouble at all," said the salesman. "All you have to do is to place a morsel of honey in this opening, once a month . . . just one morsel. . . . The ants will see to carrying it and sharing it for themselves. . . ."

"Once a month?" said the young woman. "Is one little piece enough to keep this whole nation alive for a month?"

She wore a large white straw hat, a dress of flowered muslin. Her arms were bare. The salesman eyed her sadly.

"One morsel is enough," he repeated.

"How delightful!" she said.

And she bought the transparent ant-heap.

Ricochets

"Darling!" she said. "Have you seen my ants?"

She was holding the flat, thin, living frame between her pale fingers with their tinted nails. The man seated beside her admired the curve of her bent neck.

"How interesting you make life, my dear. . . . With you, everything is fresh and different. . . . Last night, Bach . . . and now, these ants. . . ."

"Look, darling," she said, with the childlike eagerness that he loved (as she knew). "Do you see that great big one there? That's the Queen. . . . The workers wait on her. . . . I feed them myself. . . . And would you believe it, dear—one drop of honey a month is all they need! Poetic, isn't it?"

.

After a week her lover and her husband had both tired of the ant-heap. She hid it behind the mirror on the mantelpiece of her room. At the end of the month she forgot the little piece of honey. Slowly the ants starved to death. To the very end they kept a speck of honey for the Queen, who was the last to perish.

BLACK MASKS

FOR a long time I had wanted to meet Walter Cooper. I liked his books. Nobody since Kipling has written so well about animals; but in Cooper you find, not the jungles of the Far East, but the woodlands of the southern counties, flowery and well watered and alive with rabbits and foxes.

English writers are difficult to meet. Many of them live in the country and never come to London. Literature here does not form, as in France, a trade guild, with apprentices, master-craftsmen and rules, and even in this country, with all its respect for freedom, Walter Cooper had the reputation of being a wild man of the woods.

"You'll find him hard to catch," said Lady Shalford, a fellow-admirer. "He lives down in a village in Suffolk, with his wife, in a labourer's cottage. . . . Their families were Puritans on both sides, and two of their grandfathers were Non-conformist preachers. . . . Miriam Cooper wears long, shapeless dresses right down to her ankles. She's very good-looking. I don't think she ever speaks a word. . . ."

Ricochets

The description quickened my desire to know the Coopers, and one day I took the opportunity of a journey by car to stop in their village. The villagers whom I asked had no idea that a genius dwelt in their midst, but the butcher was able to tell me where the Coopers lived: they were customers of his.

"You do mean Walter Cooper, the writer?" I asked.

"Oh, that I don't know," he said. "But he's the nephew of old Miss Cooper. . . ."

I followed the road indicated by the butcher. It twisted endlessly between hedges until at last I reached an open gate. Beyond that a footpath led one through a wood rich with flowers. Rhododendron bushes, pink and orange, flame-coloured and flesh-coloured, had been planted under the trees with an artistry that was all the more subtle as its effect seemed perfectly natural. The little house, charming in its humility, had a thatched roof. . . .

It was Miriam Cooper who opened the door. As Lady Shalford had said, she wore a long muslin dress, protected by a white apron. Her face was wonderful, of disturbing, almost uncanny, purity. She listened to my apologies without seeming to

understand me, and suddenly fled in the middle of a sentence, crying: "Walter!"

Walter Cooper's long body moved awkwardly, and his mustard-coloured jacket was spattered with stains and magnificently tattered. He accepted my explanations with silent kindness, and waved me into the room where he worked. Deal shelves were laden with books. As we entered, a man looking at the titles turned round. Cooper introduced him—a famous critic. Then they resumed the conversation which I had interrupted, discussing peonies and the depth at which they should be planted.

It may seem surprising, but that visit was the beginning of a friendship. The Coopers came to see me when they were passing through Paris to spend a winter at Tamaris. I myself returned to spend a week-end with them in Suffolk. But in spite of this friendship and their manifest desire to see me, I never got to know the couple any better than on the first day. What's more, they seemed as powerless to communicate with each other as with a stranger. At night, in their little house, they sat side by side on a couch facing the fire, gently stroking each other's shoulder. I think they were fond of each other.

Ricochets

Throughout the War I saw nothing of them.

About 1920 Lady Shalford wrote to tell me that she was giving a masked ball for the benefit of a hospital, and that if I happened to be in London she would be glad if I would come. Before entering, one raised one's mask behind a screen to greet the hostess.

"Good evening," said Lady Shalford. "Had you a good crossing? Not too bad? Oh, I must show you a lady at once who will interest you."

She took my arm, left her post of duty, and scanned the crowd for a long time.

"Ah, here we are!" she said at last.

She made me sit down beside a very tall woman, wearing a black mask like everyone else, and then vanished. Rather overwhelmed and taken aback, I said:

"This is very difficult! As you will notice from my accent I am French. . . . No doubt we shall never meet again. . . . I'm going to tell you all the sad secrets that one tells to phantoms in dreams. . . ."

My partner had quick, expressive hands. She entered into the game with spirit. I found her at first rather bold for my taste. She confessed to primitive yearnings, in that ingenuously scientific

Black Masks

vocabulary with which Freud and his disciples were then providing the Anglo-Saxons. But soon she was talking so well about the animal side of women, then about the links between love and nature, and about the books she liked, all of them curious and sensual, that I was vanquished.

"Who *are* you?" I besought her to tell me. "Some of the things you say almost make me think that you know me. . . . But I've never heard your voice before. Can't you raise your mask, just for a second? You can turn your head. . . . No? Shall I never see you again? I've never enjoyed a conversation so much."

"I have passed a delightful evening," she said, rising. "Delightful. . . . But we must stop there."

She vanished into the crowd, and I did not try to rejoin her.

Ten years later Lady Shalford disclosed to me that my masked companion had been Miriam Cooper. I had seen her several times since that night, and had found her, as always, the dumb, friendly, wild creature.

As for Walter, I discovered last week that he too can talk, when he is drunk.

IRENE

"I'm so pleased to be going out with you to-night," she said. "It's been a trying week—so much work and so many disappointments. . . . But you're here and I forget it all. . . . Listen—we'll go and see a perfectly wonderful film. . . ."

"Don't imagine you're going to drag me to the pictures to-night," he said, sulkily.

"What a shame!" she said. "I was so looking forward to seeing that film with you. . . . But it doesn't matter. I know a new cabaret in Montparnasse where there are some marvellous dancers from Martinique. . . ."

"No, no!" he said, resolutely. "No black music, Irene. I've had a surfeit of that."

"Well, what *do* you want to do?"

"You know quite well," he said. "Dine in a quiet little restaurant, talk, come back to your flat, lie on the sofa and dream. . . ."

"Well, no!" she said in her turn. "No! Really, darling, you are too selfish. . . . Surprised, are you? The fact is that nobody ever tells you the truth—nobody at all. . . . You've got into the habit of seeing women accept your wishes as laws."

Irene

You're a sort of modern sultan. . . . Your harem is open; it stretches over ten countries. But a harem it is. Women are your slaves. And your own wife even more than the rest. . . . If you want to dream, they must watch you dreaming. If you want to dance, they must bestir themselves. If you've written four lines, they must listen to them. If you want to be amused, they must play Scheherazade. . . . Once again, no, my dear, no! There will be one woman at least in the world who won't bow to your caprice. . . ."

She stopped, and went on in a gentler tone:

"This is so depressing, Bernard! I was looking forward so much to seeing you. . . . I thought you would help me to forget my worries. . . . And you turn up thinking only of yourself. . . . Go away. You can come back when you've learned to recognize the existence of other people. . . ."

.

All night long Bernard lay sleepless in melancholy brooding. Irene was right. He was hateful. Not only did he deceive and desert Alice, the gentle, loyal, patient Alice; but he deceived her lovelessly. Why was he made thus? Why this craving for conquest and domination? Why this inability to

Ricochets

"recognize the existence of other people"? Pondering his past, he saw behind him troubled years of youth, inaccessible women: there was revenge in his egotism, and timidity in his cynicism. It was not a very noble sentiment.

"Noble?" he said to himself. "What platitudes I'm falling into!" He must be hard. In love, he who devours not is devoured. Still, it really would be a relief sometimes to yield, to be for once the weaker, to seek one's happiness in that of another.

Singly, separated by silences growing ever longer, the last motor-cars were returning to their garages. . . . To seek one's happiness in that of another? Couldn't he do that? Who had doomed him to cruelty? Has not every man the right, at any given moment, to start his life again? And for this new rôle, could he find a better partner than Irene? Irene, so touching, with her one evening frock, her darned stockings, her rather shabby cloak. Irene, so beautiful and so poor. So open-handed in her poverty. Ten times over he had surprised her helping Russian students, poorer than herself, who would have died of hunger if it had not been for her. She worked all the week in a shop, although before the Revolution she had been brought up in the lap of luxury. She never spoke

about it. . . . Irene. . . . How could he have haggled with her over the simple pleasures of a free evening?

The window rattled; the last 'bus roared past. Now there would be no sound to cut the long stretching line of the night. Tired of himself, Bernard wooed sleep. Suddenly he felt bathed in deep peace. He had made up his mind. He would devote himself to Irene's happiness. He would be a fond friend to her, considerate and submissive. Yes, submissive. And the decision soothed him so satisfyingly that he fell asleep almost at once. .

.

He was still full of happiness when he awoke next morning. He rose, and sang as he dressed, a thing which had not happened since he was a boy. "To-night," he thought, "I shall go and see Irene, to ask her pardon."

As he was knotting his tie, the telephone rang.

"Hul-lo," came Irene's sing-song voice. "Is that you, Bernard? Listen. . . . I simply couldn't sleep. . . . I was full of remorse. . . . The way I treated you last night. . . . You *must* forgive me. . . . I don't know what was wrong with me. . . ."

Ricochets

"On the contrary, it was *my* fault," he said. "Irene, I was vowing all night long to mend my ways."

"What nonsense!" she said. "Whatever you do, don't alter yourself. . . . Oh, no! The lovable thing about you, Bernard, is just that capriciousness, that wilfulness, that spoilt child in you. . . . It's so delightful, a man who compels you to make sacrifices. . . . I wanted to tell you that I was free to-night, and that I shan't make any plans at all. . . . Make whatever use of me you like. . . ."

Sadly Bernard shook his head as he put down the receiver.

THE CATHEDRAL

IN the year 18— a student stopped before a picture-dealer's window in the Rue Saint-Honoré. In it was displayed a canvas by Manet—the “Cathedral of Chartres.” Manet was then admired only by a handful of amateurs; but this passer-by had unerring taste, and he was spellbound by the beauty of the painting. Day after day he returned to view it. At last he plucked up courage to go in and ask its price.

“Well, well,” said the dealer, “that’s been here for a long time. I can let you have it for two thousand francs.”

The student did not possess that sum, but he came of quite a well-to-do provincial family. One of his uncles had said to him, when he set out for Paris: “I know what a young man’s life is. If you really need anything, write to me.” He asked the dealer to hold the picture for a week, and wrote to his uncle.

The young man had a mistress in Paris, married to a husband older than herself. She was bored, somewhat common, rather silly, and extremely pretty. The evening after the student

Ricochets

had asked the price of the "Cathedral," she said to him:

"I'm expecting an old school-friend who's coming from Toulon to see me. My husband hasn't time to come out with us—so I'm counting on you."

Next day her friend arrived, accompanied by another friend as well. For several days the student had to escort these three women round Paris. Meals, cabs, and theatres quickly swallowed his month's allowance. He borrowed some money from a friend, and was just beginning to feel anxious when a letter arrived from his uncle containing two thousand francs. It was a huge relief. He paid his debts and bought a present for his mistress. A collector bought the "Cathedral" and, many years later, bequeathed his paintings to the Louvre.

That student is now an aged and famous man of letters. His heart remains young. Even now he will stand still, deeply moved, at the sight of a landscape or a woman. When he leaves his house, he quite often meets in the street an old lady who lives near by. She was the mistress of his youth. Her face is fat and shapeless; heavy pouches sag beneath her once beautiful eyes; over her lip

The Cathedral

sprouts a fringe of grey hair. She can hardly walk, and one imagines her flaccid limbs. The man of letters raises his hat, but does not stop: she is malicious, he knows; and he hates the thought that once he loved her.

Sometimes he goes into the Louvre, up to the gallery where the "Cathedral" hangs. He gazes at it, and gazing, sighs.

HONOUR

MEN have a sense of honour (she said) which I respect; but sometimes I don't quite understand it.

When I married Jacques he introduced his closest friend, Bernard, to me. At first I found him brusque, almost hostile, and didn't care much for him. It was only after a few months that I got used to him; then we became very intimate and I came to regard him as a brother. One evening all three of us had been out somewhere together, and he was seated close up against me in the car for a long time; I felt that we both enjoyed it. From that day on his attitude towards me changed. He became fond, eager, and then suppliant.

I had neither said nor done anything to make him suppose that I loved him. As far as possible I pretended to interpret the passionate feelings which he expressed with such force as just friendly affection. And later on, when my husband was away from home, he came to see me every evening. He told me how unhappy he was, that I was the first woman he had ever loved, that he was constantly thinking of suicide, and that one of these

days he would jump into the Seine when he left me. I felt his sadness and sincerity so strongly that in the end I had pity on him. I became his mistress. At that time I was not in love with him; I was simply afraid that he might really be thinking of suicide. But once he had become my lover I became attached to him.

After a fortnight my husband came back. I was amazed at my own boldness in telling him of my life during his absence. He suspected nothing, and all would have been well if Bernard had not just then been seized by scruples. He told me that he loathed himself, that he had betrayed his friend, and that he could not honourably continue to shake my husband's hand if he remained my lover. I told him not to see any more of Jacques; that was impossible, he replied, for a break in their friendship would be the clearest possible sign of our conduct, and in any case his honour would not be placated by a subterfuge. He wanted to be my friend again, he said, as he used to be, and to forget what had happened between us.

I admired his attitude, and for a few days I enjoyed the reflection that my lover was a man of such nobility and a hero of friendship. I did not think that his scruples would be lasting. I felt that

Ricochets

with our first opportunity of being alone together, he would not withstand the desire to take me in his arms, and for my own part I had decided to continue our liaison. But the weeks went by, and I was forced to face the fact that Bernard was true to his decision; he avoided coming to the house except when he was quite certain of finding my husband there.

It seemed to me that his conscience might be less exacting if I myself contrived a meeting. Jacques was very trusting; I induced him to let me go and spend a few days alone at the seaside, and I asked Bernard to join me there. He wrote me a sublime, but reproachful letter. "You must not rob me of my courage," he said. "The sacrifice is cruel enough already, so much so that I, on my side, can insist on more prudence and reserve from you."

I came home so unhappy that my husband realized at once from my ravaged look that some very painful event had completely upset me. Day and night I wept; I was ill; I talked of buying a revolver. And Jacques was so skilful that in the end I confessed everything and implored him to divorce me.

At first his anger and despair were terrible.

Honour

But when he realized, after cross-examining me in endless ways, that Bernard was no longer seeing me, he mastered his own distress and thought only about me. He told me that he would speak to Bernard himself, and that if Bernard wished to join his life with mine he would stand aside, for he was not a man to keep a woman against her will. In fact, his behaviour and words were all that the most sensitive and exacting mind could have wished for.

I was not present, of course, at the conversation, but I learned from Jacques's account and through a letter from Bernard, that it was very edifying and was kept, as my husband put it, "on a very lofty plane." Each of them offered to sacrifice himself and disappear, not by suicide—for they argued that even a totally stricken man can always make a noble and worthy use of his life—but by leaving France for as long as might be necessary. After a long battle of unselfishness they agreed that it would be best for me if I remained with my husband. So it was Bernard who had to go.

Later on I discovered that, by agreement with Jacques, he gave up the idea of leaving Paris. He simply avoided ever seeing me. In spite of Jacques's kindness I was very unhappy, and I sometimes

Ricochets

think I should like to meet men who aren't heroes. Sometimes too I think that it is all unfair, because it was Bernard who made me glide from friendship into love when my spirit was at peace. I quite admit that a man cannot be thinking about his honour all the time; but when he thinks about it too late, or intermittently, it's hard luck on women.

KATE

THE ship rolls. The dark waters heave, then fall, in giant breathings.

"Mrs Wingate," the Captain introduced.

Pretty. A vigorous husband watched her respectfully. A Little Red Ridinghood dress, crimson scarf round the neck. A smile.

"Kate, darling," says the husband. "It's cocktail time."

She follows him.

.

"Who are the Wingates, Captain?"

"Wingate's a big man in cotton. And she's the daughter of a singer. A love match. Twenty years old.

"The husband is touching. . . ."

"More so than you'd think. His business is going downhill. He's determined that his wife shall not suffer, and so he has founded two fresh companies and he's working fourteen hours a day. She is bringing back thirty dresses from Paris."

"Is she grateful?"

"No. . . . In America, luxury is woman's in-

Ricochets

violable right. The man signs cheques, right up to the crash."

"Heroism?"

"Chivalrous ideal."

"Does she love him?"

"As much as she does anyone."

.

"A Martini, darling?"

"No, darling—a mint julep."

She lies full-length on the couch. Black and white dress. Perfect legs.

"I love poetry," she tells me. "I do so want to buy Verlaine. Is he good?"

.

The *marito*, a gentle colossus, expounds big business. Net cost of ocean trip: "The boat costs me twenty thousand dollars. Interest at four per cent. . . ."

"Darling," she says, "you know I don't like business talk! Put something on the gramophone."

"That's a beautiful dress of your wife's," I say to W.r.gate to console him.

His face flushes with pleasure.

Kate

"Yes, isn't it?" he says. "She has real taste, you know."

.

To-night the Captain has organized dummy horse-races. Kate lays stakes, a hundred dollars a time. And wins. The kind giant takes the tickets to the bureau, brings back the money, gets busy with the champagne.

"Your wife's lucky," I tell him.

"Yes, isn't she?" he beams. "She succeeds in everything she tries."

"She must be a great help to you in your business."

He stares at me in shocked surprise.

"Kate? Working? What an idea!"

.

I spent my evening talking Einstein with an American physicist who strayed into the jazz and cocktails. On the way back to my stateroom, I meet Kate.

"Vous êtes un méchant. Vous ne m'avez pas regardée une fois. Je vous haï!"

"Oh, what dreadful French! That's not right! What you should say is: *"Je te haïs d'autant plus que je t'ai plus aimé."*

Ricochets

Obediently she repeats, and Wingate, not understanding a word, smiles beatifically.

.

The ship glides through the mild starlit night.

"Am I clever or am I stupid?" asks Kate.

"You are clever, and you'll become stupid. It's a pity."

She reflects a moment.

"Do you believe in God?" she asks me very solemnly.

.

A sports dress. Charming. Beige jumper with slanting brown lines.

"A French husband . . ." says Kate. "What more does he do for his wife?"

"He tries to understand her, my dear Kate."

She runs her tongue over her lips.

"But there's nothing to understand," she says, quite ingenuous, quite sincere.

RICOCHETS

DANIEL looked up at his wife with surprise. She very seldom came into his room in the morning.

“Do you want to talk to me?” he asked.

“Daniel,” she said, “will you do me a favour? Come with me to a concert this evening . . . Rubinstein is playing the Chopin preludes, and I should so enjoy hearing them with you beside me, if I could. . . . It’s three months now since we went out together in the evening.”

“It’s three months since you asked me,” said Daniel, bored.

“I haven’t asked, because your refusals became humiliating. . . . So I vowed, Daniel, not to offer you my company any more, and to wait for you to express the wish yourself. I took a stall next to mine for Anne, but she rang up this morning to say she was ill, and for two hours I’ve been trying to find someone else. . . . I must say it’s rather absurd, and depressing, to spend the evening beside an empty seat.”

“Ask a man,” said Daniel.

Ricochets

"You know," she said, "I vowed never to go out with any man but yourself."

"What a lot of vows!" said Daniel.

He reflected for a moment, and went on hesitantly: "Look here, I'd like to give you pleasure, but I've taken on something else. I'll try to get out of it. If I can, I'll come to the concert with you."

"You're a dear," she said.

"Oh, it's not a promise . . ." said Daniel in a surly tone. "I only said I would try."

He went to his office. "Gobelins, 43.14," he called. It was the number of Béatrice de Saulges, who had been his mistress for some weeks, whom he loved with the clumsy passion of his maturity.

"Is that you?" said Daniel, lowering his voice. "Listen . . . is it still fixed that we go out to-night? You're not going to drop me at the last moment, like last time, are you?"

"Oh, how tiresome you are!" she said. . . . "And you don't put things very nicely, do you? After all, you know that things only amuse me if I can make up my mind at the last moment. . . . Do you want to spoil all my pleasure?"

"I beg pardon," said Daniel. "After all, you really might have seen how much I've respected your caprices since we've been friends. . . . But

to-night I simply must know what you're doing, because I have to give an answer myself."

"You're dreadful . . ." she said. "I simply don't know at all. . . . Listen—ring me up in an hour's time. I'll think it over and do my best to decide by then."

During luncheon Daniel's wife asked if she could count on him. He replied rather peevishly that he couldn't say, that he hadn't had time to telephone yet. And just then Béatrice de Saulges was ringing up Pierre Pradier, a young deputy whom she had met in Geneva, and loved.

"Is that you, Pradier?" she said. "Oh, it is you, Mademoiselle Drouet? I wanted to speak to Monsieur Pradier . . . No, don't disturb him if he's not to be interrupted. . . . Oh, no, I quite understand . . . Besides, he'd be annoyed. . . . I only wanted to know if he is still going to call for me to-night to go to the evening sitting in the Chamber . . .? Yes . . .? It's down in his engagement book . . .? You're sure he won't change his mind as he did last night? You don't know . . .? Oh, yes, of course . . . But for the moment he hasn't said anything? Thank you so much, Mademoiselle Drouet . . . Au revoir. . . ."

When Daniel telephoned a little later, a maid told him that Madame de Saulges was so sorry, but she wouldn't be free, as she was obliged to attend a family dinner-party. Daniel went to see if his wife was still at home. He found her lying on a couch, reading.

"I'm so glad, my dear," he said, "I've managed to get free. I'll be able to come with you to-night. I wanted to. . . ."

"How nice of you!" she said. "I'm delighted!"

"Not more than I am," he said.

And when he left the room she sat still for a long time, full of pensive self-reproach at having misjudged her Daniel.

THE DEBUTANTE

WHEN Joseph D. Wilmington of Newark, N.J., had made his pile of several million dollars in real estate, it was decided by Mrs Wilmington, when their daughter reached the age of eighteen, that Margaret simply must be taken to New York and launched upon society. The notion was distasteful to Joseph D., who timidly said so, and to Margaret, who said nothing.

Mrs Wilmington herself admitted the difficulties of the scheme, the most serious being that the Wilmingtons knew nobody in New York. Through a common friend they were put into touch with a Mrs Mortimer Leeds, a lady of good family but in reduced circumstances, who agreed, for a commission of ten per cent of the expenses, to arrange the Wilmingtons' debut in the fashionable world of New York.

Through her they learned that their plight was not unique, nor had it been overlooked by the spirit of American organization. She informed them of the existence of a certain Miss Riley, who compiled every season lists of debutantes, in which the names of two hundred young ladies could be

Ricochets

entered for a fee of five hundred dollars apiece. Miss Riley also drew up lists of young gentlemen, for whom no charge was made provided that they were good dancers and thoroughly presentable. After the payment of the five hundred dollars, both of these lists were communicated to you, and it was understood that anybody on the roll could invite other subscribers without introduction.

Thus the Wilingtons passed instantaneously from the status of strangers to that of old New Yorkers, with hundreds of friends. Miss Riley herself levied ten per cent on the cost of engraving invitation cards, the hiring of rooms, the fees for dance-bands, the bills for flowers and refreshments: which brought the commission payable by the Wilingtons up to twenty per cent. Bear in mind that their first dance cost fourteen thousand dollars, and the point is not without significance.

Mrs Mortimer Leeds had been quick to size up the three persons whose education she had undertaken. The only intelligent one was the father. Joseph D. was gruff and surly, but not devoid of humour, and in his proper setting must have been quite a character. Mrs Wilington was coarse and stupid. The daughter was shy, tongue-tied and sensuous.

The Debutante

Mrs Mortimer Leeds saw to it that the Wilmingtons became sub-tenants of a box at the Metropolitan Opera, and ordered them to put in an appearance there thrice weekly. That box became the nightmare of the family, who liked neither Wagner nor Verdi. At first Joseph D. tried to sleep in it, but that was forbidden by Mrs Mortimer Leeds. But if the Opera was the husband's bugbear, the dress-makers avenged him through his wife. To spend five thousand dollars on clothes is easy enough, but to try them on, when you suffer from varicose veins, is torture. Going to a dance is no less a torment for parents who have always gone to bed at ten o'clock. But the Wilmingtons submitted to everything, having Mrs Mortimer Leeds's word for it that by the end of the season their daughter would be engaged to a young man whose ancestors had come over on the *Mayflower*.

Margaret Wilmington was extremely bored at the dances organized by Miss Riley's subscribers, until at one of them she met a medical student, an agnostic and communist, who amused her by the violence of his conversation and the boldness of his behaviour. By the third week she was spending all her evenings with him in a speak-easy on Forty-second Street, drinking glass for glass, talking

about repressions, and admiring the Five Year Plan, which she referred to as *Piatiletka*.

After a month of these diversions, she resolutely announced to Joseph D. that she was going to marry David M. Bradsky, whose parents had landed from a ship which was not called the *Mayflower*, about 1913. Mrs Wilmington wept buckets. Joseph D., who took things as he found them, and had learned in business not to cry over spilt milk, said that he had nothing against this guy Bradsky; but he remarked that, without spending one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, he could have found a son-in-law of equal social worth in Newark, N.J.

THE GREAT MISTAKE

"**Y**ou know," she said, "Daniel's great mistake is his jealousy. . . . It's so unfair. . . . I give you my word that my one and only desire is to be faithful to him, and not to hurt him. . . . But I cannot bear 'scenes'—they madden me."

"Does he make violent scenes?"

"Violent?" she said. "No, violence isn't in his nature. I should prefer a rather brutal quarrel which would clear the air and end in our agreeing, or even in a break. . . . Daniel sulks, like a woman. He comes in with a gloomy face, and talks without looking at me, between his teeth. . . . Then he insinuates that he is unhappy, that I'm hurting him and making him ill. . . . He sighs, and closes his eyes with a wearied look, and seems hardly able to breathe. . . . It worries me dreadfully, though I know I've done nothing. . . . And there goes one more evening, spoilt."

"But, Hélène, don't you think that the most jealous of men can be soothed by obvious fidelity? You love Daniel, so you ought to give up everything else. He won't worry then."

"I'm not so sure," she said. "He loves his

worry. And I don't want to live in captivity. In any case, you're preaching against yourself now; you, my dear, would be one of the first friends that Daniel would require me to give up."

"I? Why should he be jealous of me? I am nothing to you."

"Nothing? Oh, nothing at all, of course . . . That's a poor way of counting our friendship! In any case, if I am nothing to you, that isn't how Daniel sees it. At this very moment he is in misery on your account."

"Then he's just being stupid."

"What did I tell you?"

"I don't care: I stand by my own opinion. If you really love him you ought to placate him by sacrificing everybody else."

"Including yourself?"

"Myself too."

"What a good friend you are!"

"Don't be nasty! You know I'd be heartbroken if we gave up our harmless expeditions. But a woman must choose. If you want this man, you must keep the rules of the game."

"How stupid men are!" she said. "They would force the most resolutely honest women into false positions. Three months ago I promised I

The Great Mistake

would always tell Daniel everything. And I tried to. . . . It was very simple-minded of me. . . . He took my confidences in such a way that now I have to hide the most trifling things from him so as to spare him distress."

"For instance?"

"Well, I was at Missia's last week, and I ran across that charming Italian again—Salviati, whom we met in Venice. He asked me to dinner. I didn't tell Daniel."

"And you accepted?"

"Nobody is so amusing as Salviati."

"You're very rash, Hélène. Anybody might have seen you."

"Oh, I'm not a child! We dined at Salviati's flat."

"Well, admit that Daniel had ground for jealousy."

"Why? You really are comical. I don't love Salviati. I know too much about his adventures and his fickleness to fall into the trap. But he is cheerful and self-confident, and he knows just how women like to be talked to."

"It's just habit."

"A pleasant one, all the same. . . . And he knows how to kiss. . . ."

Ricochets

"What a monster you are!"

"I?" she said. "I'm the most faithful of women. But I do need a trustful atmosphere about me. Any supervision just incites me to dodge it, and if I feel I'm not trusted I tell lies. It's only human."

"And what do you want then, Hélène? Do you expect Daniel to hear all about your supper with Salviati, smiling? I wonder very much what you'd think of him if he accepted the rôle of confidant?"

"I should think him a weakling," she said.

"And you'd despise him?"

"Yes," she said.

THE WILL

THE château of Chardeuil had been bought by a rich manufacturer forced by advancing age and ill-health to retire to country life, and in a short time the whole of Périgord could talk of nothing but the luxurious and tasteful restoration of this mansion, after a century of neglect by its noble owners. The gardens, it was said, were particularly wonderful. A landscape gardener from Paris had dammed the course of the Loue to make an artificial lake. He had turned Chardeuil into a second Versailles.

Fine gardens are few and far between in that rustic province, where most proprietors follow the example of the Saviniacs and turn their parks into kitchen-gardens. The flower-beds of Chardeuil aroused the utmost curiosity, as far as Brive, and Périgueux, and almost as far as Bordeaux. Nevertheless, after a whole year's work visitors were fewer than might have been expected. Périgord only welcomes newcomers with good credentials, and nobody knew who this Madame Bernin was.

She seemed to be barely thirty-five, while her husband was at least sixty-five. She was quite

good-looking, and even in that remote spot she changed her clothes three times a day. That was not natural, and it was at first supposed by local society that she was no wife, but a mistress. But Madame de La Guichardie was the sovereign lady of the district, and although she had lived in the country ever since the War, she nevertheless knew her Paris inside-out. So when she pronounced that Madame Bernin really was Madame Bernin, and came of a modest but respectable family, every château accepted this declaration. Nobody would have ventured to gainsay that powerful lady on such a subject. But many families still professed the secret heresy, and believed that, even if Madame Bernin was quite entitled to her name, she was nevertheless only a mistress married *in extremis*.

Gaston and Valentine Romilly, who could see the towers of Chardeuil from the rising ground at Preyssac, and so were the Bernin's nearest neighbours, considered that they, of all people, were the least entitled to take up a stern attitude; and as the Bernins had left cards at Preyssac, and as their mother-confessor, Madame de La Guichardie, had given them full leave to be polite, they decided to return the compliment.

Their welcome was all the warmer for their

The Will

being among the first conquests. Not only did the newcomers make them stay on until tea-time, but they invited the Romillys to go all over the house, and round the gardens and outbuildings as well. Gaston and Valentine Romilly felt that the couple were beginning to suffer from the ownership of all this unshareable perfection. Nor were the Bernins uncongenial. Bernin himself had preserved, from his sovereignty in the workshops, a somewhat domineering manner, and a habit of expressing downright opinions about subjects of which he knew next to nothing; but he seemed sound at heart. Valentine was touched by the fondness he showed towards his wife, a small, fair, plump woman, kind and cheerful. But while they were going over the first floor, and had duly admired the transformation of the house, astonishing in so short a time, with its bathrooms let into the thickness of the old walls and its lifts into the towers, Valentine was taken aback when she heard Madame Bernin reply to her:

“Yes, Adolphe made up his mind it should all be perfect. For the moment, of course, it is only a country place; but he knows that I expect to live here after his death—long may that be, of course!—and he wants me to be just as comfortable

as in a town house. . . . I daresay you know that he has several children by his first marriage? So he has made safeguards, and Chardeuil has been bought in my name. It is my property entirely."

In a meadow near the house the buildings of an old farm had been turned into stables. Gaston admired the superb horses, the perfect condition of the saddlery, and the impeccable grooms.

"Horses are my chief joy," said Madame Bernin enthusiastically. "My father served in the cavalry and put his children in the saddle straight out of the cradle!"

She stroked the gleaming hind-quarters, and went on with a sigh:

"It is certainly going to be dreadfully expensive to keep all this cavalry. . . . But Adolphe thought of that: there is a provision in his will for a special fund, to allow for the improvement of blood horses in the park of Chardeuil. . . . That will be quite separate, Adolphe, will it not?"

The gardens were not yet completed, but the general lay-out of the beds could be seen. The points towards which the architect wished the eye to be drawn were marked by fine statues. Workmen were raising romantic pillars in the middle of an

The Will

oblong basin, on an artificial island of concrete. The visitors were led down a long avenue of chestnuts which brought them out in front of a cluster of small houses, built in the style of Périgord farms, and roofed with old tiles.

"I didn't know of this village," said Valentine.

"It isn't a village!" said Madame Bernin with a laugh. "Those are the servants' quarters. It was Adolphe's idea to build them like that, as separate houses. . . . And you will see how ingenious it is from my point of view, as regards the future: we have several couples in our service, most devoted, and I simply must keep them, even when I am left alone. . . . Well, to each couple Adolphe is going to bequeath the house which they occupy, with a clause annulling the legacy if they should leave my service. . . . So, you see, not only are they bound to me, but they are partly paid without my having to spend a penny—it's a splendid safeguard for me. . . . And that is separate, of course. . . ."

"But is that legal?" asked Gaston Romilly.

"Oh, you don't know Adolphe! He and his lawyer spent hours getting the draft right. You can't imagine how considerate he is, for all his gruff ways—aren't you, Adolphe?"

She slipped her arm under the old man's, and he grunted as he gave her a fond glance.

It was a long walk. The visitors were not spared the farm, nor the model dairy, nor the poultry farm with its rare breeds and the clucking of hundreds of miraculously white hens. But at last the Romillys were alone in their car again, and Valentine asked:

"Well? What do you think of them?"

"I like Bernin," said Gaston. "He is surly, and too well pleased with himself, but he's a good sort. She is queer. . . ."

"Queer?" said Valentine. "I think she's terrifying. . . . 'The will' here, and 'the will' there. . . . 'When I'm left alone,' and 'long may that be, of course.' . . . Really, it is painful, conversation like that in front of the poor man, about all that's going to happen when he dies."

They remained silent for a time while the car ran through the misty meadows between the poplars in the valleys. Gaston, as he drove, kept an eye on the road, which was dotted with children going home from school. At last he said:

"All the same, you know . . . It's quite reasonable, taking all those precautions so that his wife

The Will

can be perfectly at ease after he is gone. When I listened to her I was thinking about ourselves. . . . I have been wrong in not making a will. I am going to see about that."

"What an idea, darling! Horrifying! In any case I am the one who is going to die first."

"Why? You don't know. You are younger than I am, and there's nothing wrong with you. On the other hand, I am——"

"Be quiet! You're just an imaginary invalid. . . . You have excellent health, and in any case, if you did die, I shouldn't want to survive you. What would my life be without you? I'd kill myself."

"How can you talk such nonsense, Valentine? It's absurd! You know quite well that nobody dies of grief, however painful it may be. . . . Besides, I'm not all you have in the world. There's Colette, your daughter, and her husband . . . and your grandchildren. . . ."

"Colette has her own life now. She doesn't need us any more."

"Exactly. That's one reason why I ought to make provision for you."

Again they fell silent, as the car ran through a thicker bank of mist, and then Valentine went on:

"It is quite true that if some ill fate forced me

to survive you by a few months, I should be easier in my mind if there were—oh, not a will!—that would seem to me like an evil omen—no—just some document to make it plain that Preyssac and the land there should in any case remain in my possession until my own death. . . . Our son-in-law is very nice, but he's a Saviniac. He takes after his father. . . . He loves land. He would be quite capable of wanting to round off his own estates at my expense, and sending me to live in some small house, no matter what. . . . I should hate that. . . .”

“That must be made impossible,” said Gaston rather gloomily. “I’m quite ready to sign all the papers you want, and even to leave you Preyssac by will. But would it be legal? I mean—isn’t the value of Preyssac greater than your own share?”

“A little. But that could easily be adjusted,” said Valentine. “The solicitor told me that he would tell you how it could be worded, whenever you like.”

“What!” he said. “Have you put the question to Maître Passaga already?”

“Oh, just casually,” said Valentine.

THE BROWN CAPE

“**D**ID you know that charming Austrian poet, Riesenthal?” he asked.

“I met him only once,” I said. “I remember how he talked to me about Russia, with a delicious blend of simplicity and mystery. . . . His stories were veiled around by a faint mist that blurred the shapes of his characters very delicately and lent something superhuman to their form. Even his voice was strange, and somehow veiled. . . . Yes, really, I only saw him once, but I liked him more than many men whom I’ve known all my life. Soon after that short encounter I heard of his death, but with no surprise, for he hardly looked like a living being. . . . Since then, travelling in the most different countries—in France, in Germany, in Italy, everywhere—I have constantly met friends of Riesenthal. Sometimes it was a man, sometimes a woman, whose life he filled, whose spirit he shaped, who lives to-day as a subtler, a more sensitive creature than other people—because of Riesenthal.”

“Thank you for saying that,” he answered. “I myself was a friend of Riesenthal. Like your-

self, I met him once, just for an hour, and could never forget him. Three years ago, passing through my part of the country, he remembered me, wrote to me, and broke his journey for a day at my house. It was early autumn, and the air was turning cool. I live at the foot of high mountains. Riesenthal, frail and subject to cold, suffered from the lack of sufficiently warm clothing, and asked me with a smile if I could lend him an overcoat. As you see, I am much stouter and taller than our friend: so I fetched a brown cape which I used to wear for shooting during the winter. Riesenthal was amused, pointing out that he could wrap himself twice round in its folds; rolled up thus in my cape, he strolled with me for a long time under the trees.

“So pleased was he by my house and garden, by the ruddy foliage and the high encircling hills, that he decided to stay a day longer. . . . During the night he spread the brown cape over his bed, and next day he put it on again as a dressing-gown to work in. That evening he told me he didn't want to leave; and I, for my part, was only too glad to keep this unique and delightful being under my roof as long as possible. So day followed day; he stayed on for two weeks, all the time living enveloped in my shooting-cape. At last he

The Brown Cape

went off, leaving me a poem as a remembrance of his visit. A few months later I heard that he was dead.

“During the next autumn I had another visitor, a French writer whose smooth and limpid style I greatly admire, but who was then almost a stranger to me. He too stopped at my little house for a single day, on his way to Vienna. Our luncheon conversation was halting. I felt that the friendship I had hoped for was receding, that we were too different from each other, and regretfully I noticed that we were about to part without having said anything sincere or profound. After the meal we strolled under the yellowing trees. He complained of the damp air, and I fetched Riesenthal’s cape for him.

“It is rather a strange fact, but as soon as my guest had this covering over his shoulders, he seemed a man transformed. His mind, naturally exact and sometimes bitter, seemed suddenly veiled with melancholy. He became confidential, almost affectionate. In fact, by nightfall a friendship had been formed; and just like Riesenthal, this autumn visitor coming for one day stayed on with me for two whole weeks.

"After this, as you may imagine, the brown cape became a very precious object to me, and, without any definite belief, I attributed to it some sort of symbolic and beneficent power.

"During that winter I fell in love with a wonderfully beautiful Viennese, Ingeborg von Dietrich, who came of a noble but ruined family and earned her living in a publisher's office. I offered to marry her, but like so many of these young women who grew up after the War, she was fanatically independent, and whilst making it clear that I was not displeasing to her, she told me she could not bear the idea of tying herself by marriage. I, for my part, could not bear seeing her free in a great city, surrounded by men of no scruples, and in these circumstances several distressing months went by.

"In the spring Ingeborg agreed to visit me at my house in the Wienerwald. On her first evening there we went out into the garden after dinner, and I said to her: 'Will you do me a great favour? Will you let me cover your shoulders with a cape of mine, instead of your cloak? I know you aren't a sentimentalist. My wish must seem quite absurd to you. What does it matter? This is your first evening in my house—do grant me this, please.'

The Brown Cape

“She laughed, and making fun of me very prettily, she accepted. . . .”

He broke off his story, because, through the evening mist, a charming figure was gliding towards us down the pathway, wrapped in a brown cape.

“Have you met my wife?” he said.

THE HAND

“ **H**OW can you say such things, Bertrand? ”

“ I say them because they’re true.”

“ Do you really maintain that it is always the woman who takes the first step? ”

“ ‘Always’ is a dangerous word. What I do maintain is that most men are timid, and terrified of a rebuff, and that they hardly ever take a risk unless they have a sign from the woman. . . . Sometimes the sign is almost imperceptible.”

“ But what about yourself, Bertrand, you and Madame de Saulges? You aren’t going to tell me that one day she said to you: ‘I wish to be your mistress!’ ”

“ How often have I told you that I have never been her lover! ”

“ Oh, I know you are too discreet to admit it, but everybody knows. . . . Now, just between ourselves, was it Béatrice de Saulges who made the first sign? ”

“ Well, yes, it was! ”

“ Really! And what did she say? ”

“ I had been seeing her for several months when,

The Hand

one day when I was leaving, she said: 'You know I'm alone every Sunday, quite alone?'"

"Well, that was certainly quite direct. . . . And Denise?"

"Oh, she is very open. She unmasks her batteries with no vain precautions. . . ."

"What a dreadful person! But what about myself, Bertrand? I'm your wife now. When you met me I was the shyest of women—I would take fright at anything! I really didn't give you the smallest sign. . . ."

"I am very sorry, but I must contradict you."

"You can't maintain that I provoked you. I thought you were a delightful friend—nothing more. . . ."

"Provoked? No: but you encouraged me."

"I?"

"Don't you remember that the first time we went to a concert together, when Tristan's call was heard, you laid your hand on mine?"

"Why, certainly. . . . A natural gesture."

"Perfectly natural, darling. That's just what I say."

POOR MAMMA

BERTRAND SCHMITT was opening his letters. His wife Isabelle amused herself by watching his face, now anxious, now smiling, as his eye ran over the handwritings.

"Hullo!" he said. "A letter from Pont-de-l'Eure. . . . We don't often see that postmark nowadays. . . ."

He looked for the signature.

"Germaine Guérin? Oh, yes . . . Denise Holmann's mother. What does she want?"

Mme Guérin announced the death of her mother, the Baroness d'Hocquinvillle, who had died at Rouen, at her house in the Rue Damiette, in her eightieth year. "I wanted to let you know this sad news myself, as you were so friendly with my dear daughter and used to know my poor Mamma long ago. I remember the days when Denise used to bring you to the Rue Damiette and how much poor Mamma enjoyed hearing you both chatter together. Even then Denise was a remarkable girl, and you—well, I do not wish to pay you compliments, but I do wish you to realize how much poor Mamma appreciated you. . . . For myself

Poor Mamma

this will mean a terrible gap. For thirty years and more I have been going to see her at Rouen every week. In spite of her great age she was wise beyond words. My grief would be intolerable, I think, if I had not the support of Georges, who is admirable, as ever, and the affection of my children. . . . If you should happen to be in Normandy some day, and if you do not dread the chatter of an old woman, come and see me: I shall be glad to show you some relics of poor Mamma. . . .”

“Did you know this Mme d’Hocquinvillle?” asked Isabelle.

“Only just . . . I only remember going to that Rouen house once or twice with Denise; it was old and very broken-down. . . .”

“But why does her daughter write you an emotional letter?”

“To get pity,” said Bertrand. “She’s one of those people to whom any misfortune means reflected glory. . . . It is all the more comical as she was always very hard on ‘poor Mamma’ in her lifetime.”

“Why hard, Bertrand?”

“The d’Hocquinvilles were penniless. Mme Guérin herself had made two good marriages in succession, and had plenty of money. She gave

her mother enough to live on, but only just enough, and she made her pay interest on it in humiliations. . . . It was quite horrible."

Then after a moment's thought he added:

"And not only in humiliation—in complaisance too."

"What do you mean?"

"It's an old story. . . . This Mme Guérin's first husband was a poor devil called Herpain, who was the father of Denise. . . . She deceived him, first with an officer, then with Guérin himself, who was then a bachelor. But to cloak her assignations she needed alibis, and 'poor Mamma,' well drilled, backed up her daughter's lies. . . . I'm not even quite sure that she did not have the lovers actually in her own house. . . . There was something of the go-between in poor Mamma."

"There is something of the go-between in nearly all women," said Isabelle, meditatively.

"In the case of Mme d'Hocquinvillle," Bertrand went on, "this complicity was not surprising. In her own young days she had the reputation of being rather 'frail,' as they used to say. My grandfather, a man of austerity, used to refer to her with great contempt. . . . She didn't deserve that—she was just stupid."

Poor Mamma

"You must write a line of sympathy, Bertrand."

"Do you think so? What should I say? It is all a matter of indifference to me."

"Oh yes, I know. But all the same it's a question of politeness. . . ."

Bertrand sighed, sat down at the table, and took up a sheet of notepaper:

"DEAR MME GUÉRIN," he wrote, "I was deeply moved by your letter. How good of you, in the midst of your terrible grief, to let me know this lamentable news yourself! Yes, I remember with sorrow those all too-few visits to the Rue Damiette. The beauty of the place, the smiling and still youthful grace of your poor Mamma, her kindness towards the boy I then was, all make pictures of rare perfection in my memory, and pictures which I shall never forget. As for yourself, I know well how devoted you were to your mother, and that only the affection of your husband and your daughters will enable you to pick up the threads of your life again. If I happen to be passing through Pont-de-l'Eure, I shall certainly come and talk over the old days. Be assured of my very respectful sympathy. . . ."

He handed the letter to Isabelle.

THE HAND

“ **H**OW can you say such things, Bertrand? ”

“ I say them because they’re true.”

“ Do you really maintain that it is always the woman who takes the first step? ”

“ ‘ Always ’ is a dangerous word. What I do maintain is that most men are timid, and terrified of a rebuff, and that they hardly ever take a risk unless they have a sign from the woman. . . . Sometimes the sign is almost imperceptible.”

“ But what about yourself, Bertrand, you and Madame de Saulges? You aren’t going to tell me that one day she said to you: ‘ I wish to be your mistress! ’ ”

“ How often have I told you that I have never been her lover! ”

“ Oh, I know you are too discreet to admit it, but everybody knows. . . . Now, just between ourselves, was it Béatrice de Saulges who made the first sign? ”

“ Well, yes, it was! ”

“ Really! And what did she say? ”

“ I had been seeing her for several months when,

The Hand

one day when I was leaving, she said: ' You know I'm alone every Sunday, quite alone? ' "

" Well, that was certainly quite direct. . . . And Denise? "

" Oh, she is very open. She unmask her batteries with no vain precautions. . . . "

" What a dreadful person! But what about myself, Bertrand? I'm your wife now. When you met me I was the shyest of women—I would take fright at anything! I really didn't give you the smallest sign. . . . "

" I am very sorry, but I must contradict you. "

" You can't maintain that I provoked you. I thought you were a delightful friend — nothing more. . . . "

" Provoked? No: but you encouraged me. "

" I? "

" Don't you remember that the first time we went to a concert together, when Tristan's call was heard, you laid your hand on mine? "

" Why, certainly. . . . A natural gesture. "

" Perfectly natural, darling. That's just what I say. "

POOR MAMMA

BERTRAND SCHMITT was opening his letters. His wife Isabelle amused herself by watching his face, now anxious, now smiling, as his eye ran over the handwritings.

"Hullo!" he said. "A letter from Pont-de-l'Eure. . . . We don't often see that postmark nowadays. . . ."

He looked for the signature.

"Germaine Guérin? Oh, yes . . . Denise Holmann's mother. What does she want?"

Mme Guérin announced the death of her mother, the Baroness d'Hocquinvillle, who had died at Rouen, at her house in the Rue Damiette, in her eightieth year. "I wanted to let you know this sad news myself, as you were so friendly with my dear daughter and used to know my poor Mamma long ago. I remember the days when Denise used to bring you to the Rue Damiette and how much poor Mamma enjoyed hearing you both chatter together. Even then Denise was a remarkable girl, and you—well, I do not wish to pay you compliments, but I do wish you to realize how much poor Mamma appreciated you. . . . For myself

this will mean a terrible gap. For thirty years and more I have been going to see her at Rouen every week. In spite of her great age she was wise beyond words. My grief would be intolerable, I think, if I had not the support of Georges, who is admirable, as ever, and the affection of my children. . . . If you should happen to be in Normandy some day, and if you do not dread the chatter of an old woman, come and see me: I shall be glad to show you some relics of poor Mamma. . . .”

“Did you know this Mme d’Hocquinvillè?” asked Isabelle.

“Only just . . . I only remember going to that Rouen house once or twice with Denise; it was old and very broken-down. . . .”

“But why does her daughter write you an emotional letter?”

“To get pity,” said Bertrand. “She’s one of those people to whom any misfortune means reflected glory. . . . It is all the more comical as she was always very hard on ‘poor Mamma’ in her lifetime.”

“Why hard, Bertrand?”

“The d’Hocquinvilles were penniless. Mme Guérin herself had made two good marriages in succession, and had plenty of money. She gave

her mother enough to live on, but only just enough, and she made her pay interest on it in humiliations. . . . It was quite horrible."

Then after a moment's thought he added:

"And not only in humiliation—in complaisance too."

"What do you mean?"

"It's an old story. . . . This Mme Guérin's first husband was a poor devil called Herpain, who was the father of Denise. . . . She deceived him, first with an officer, then with Guérin himself, who was then a bachelor. But to cloak her assignations she needed alibis, and 'poor Mamma,' well drilled, backed up her daughter's lies. . . . I'm not even quite sure that she did not have the lovers actually in her own house. . . . There was something of the go-between in poor Mamma."

"There is something of the go-between in nearly all women," said Isabelle, meditatively.

"In the case of Mme d'Hocquinvillle," Bertrand went on, "this complicity was not surprising. In her own young days she had the reputation of being rather 'frail,' as they used to say. My grandfather, a man of austerity, used to refer to her with great contempt. . . . She didn't deserve that—she was just stupid."

Poor Mamma

"You must write a line of sympathy, Bertrand."

"Do you think so? What should I say? It is all a matter of indifference to me."

"Oh yes, I know. But all the same it's a question of politeness. . . ."

Bertrand sighed, sat down at the table, and took up a sheet of notepaper:

"DEAR MME GUÉRIN," he wrote, "I was deeply moved by your letter. How good of you, in the midst of your terrible grief, to let me know this lamentable news yourself! Yes, I remember with sorrow those all too-few visits to the Rue Damiette. The beauty of the place, the smiling and still youthful grace of your poor Mamma, her kindness towards the boy I then was, all make pictures of rare perfection in my memory, and pictures which I shall never forget. As for yourself, I know well how devoted you were to your mother, and that only the affection of your husband and your daughters will enable you to pick up the threads of your life again. If I happen to be passing through Pont-de-l'Eure, I shall certainly come and talk over the old days. Be assured of my very respectful sympathy. . . ."

He handed the letter to Isabelle.

Ricochets

“Read that,” he said. “I think it’s absurd.”

Isabelle skimmed the lines quickly, and then, solemn and satisfied, handed it back to her husband.

“Exactly what’s wanted,” she said.

THESE POOR JEWS

"**Y**OU *must* find a bed for her," said M. Kahn to Dr Rosenthal.

The doctor raised his arms and shrugged his shoulders. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles, which he took off and wiped when he was worried.

"I insist on a bed being found for her," repeated M. Kahn with all the aggressiveness of a shy man. "She was recommended to me by several friends. She's dreadfully poor and the baby is due in a few days."

"It is against the rules of the nursing-home," grumbled the doctor. "She is not Jewish."

He removed his spectacles and wiped them.

"Who founded this nursing-home?" said M. Kahn. "Everything here has come out of my pocket—buildings, equipment, staff. . . . I can change the rules if I want to. . . . She is not Jewish, but she is in distress. That's enough."

"There are many women in distress," said the doctor, acidly, "but they aren't princesses, and no rules are changed on their behalf. . . . I know this one all right. I've very good reason to know her. She is the daughter of General Atnikhov who was

Ricochets

governor of the province at the time of the Kichinev pogroms. Her father allowed hundreds of Jews to be murdered without sending down a single policeman."

"All the more reason for showing charity to the daughter," said M. Kahn, angrily. "We'll show her that Jews have hearts."

Dr Rosenthal dropped his protests once Princess Baratinsky was under his charge. She was good-looking, sweet, and grateful. Revolution and exile had made her nervous. She had had to flee from Russia on horseback, riding behind her uncle. Her father had been killed. In Paris she kept alive for a few months by selling her jewels, and then married Baratinsky, who was as poor as herself, and she found a poorly paid job behind the counter in a small shop. At the worst possible time she found herself pregnant, and had it not been for this M. Kahn, to whom a friend recommended her—heaven alone knows what would have become of her.

"You'll allow me to scream, doctor, won't you?" she said. "When I'm in pain I like to scream."

Rosenthal smiled. She made him feel disarmed. Everybody in the nursing-home liked the little

Princess. Her nurse, Mademoiselle Esther, knitted vests for the baby. M. Kahn sent her lilac and orchids. In the evenings Prince Baratinsky, who was a taxi-driver, came to see his wife and sat beside her bed. She leaned over and whispered fond and foolish things that made him laugh. Sometimes she would say thoughtfully: "You can't imagine, Peter, how nice they all are to me. . . . You know, when I think of the old days I'm seized with remorse. . . . How unjust we were to the Jews in Russia! My poor father. . . ."

When her husband had left and she could not sleep, she would lay out cards on the coverlet and read her fortune.

"Well, are the cards favourable?" asked Mademoiselle Esther brightly when she found her brooding over the outspread patterns.

But the little Princess shook her head. She believed in the cards.

.

The Julien Kahn Nursing Home was a model of cleanliness, its white walls curved at every corner. Dr Rosenthal, a zealot for antisepsis, was the perfect specialist, and accidents were rare, almost unheard-of.

"Our statistics are the best in Paris," M. Kahn used to say, rubbing his hands.

The little Princess's confinement was not an easy one, but she was in no danger. She screamed a lot and called for chloroform, which Rosenthal refused to give her, as he belonged to the school of doctors which holds that pain has useful powers of its own. The baby was a boy, fair and pink, too large for so frail a mother.

Mademoiselle Esther was taken aback when, three days after the birth, the Princess's temperature jumped up. In the morning the thermometer showed 100° , and in the evening 104.5° . The patient was hot, and complained of pains in all her limbs.

"I don't like the look of it, doctor," said Mademoiselle Esther as they moved away from the bedside. "She has a bad history. . . . As soon as M. Kahn brought her here I felt frightened."

Rosenthal took off his spectacles, drew out his handkerchief, and began wiping the glasses.

"A bad history?" he said. "What? What could it possibly be? After all, it can't be an infection? Where could the germs have come from?"

Dr Rosenthal was never to know where the

These Poor Jews

little Princess had caught the germs of a puerperal infection, which was to gainsay him; but caught them she had, for the fever grew steadily worse. At first the patient made light of it. She spoke of nursing-fever. And then the visible anxiety of her attendants caught her. She asked for her husband.

It was very difficult to get hold of the Prince, who was now doing night work to help his budget in these hard times. But at last he arrived and sat down beside her. He was tall, with a shaven head, and that curious ease of bearing of a Guards' officer. He had not delayed even to remove his taxi-driver's cap and overcoat, which he wore with a military air.

"What is the matter?" he asked Rosenthal impatiently. "Has she been looked after? You must do something. . . . Isn't there a serum?"

"There is a serum," said Rosenthal, anxious and annoyed. "I have given injections. They very often succeed, but in this case we've had no result. What else can one do?"

The little Princess was now in such a high fever that she recognized nobody. She twisted the sheets in her fingers and kept saying:

"The Knave of clubs . . . the Knave of clubs. . . ."

Ricochets

Only once she looked at her husband, and said fondly:

"Peter, those poor Jews. . . ."

In the evening M. Kahn himself arrived, escorted by the matron, Mademoiselle Samson, respectful and anxious.

"I've heard all about it," he said to Rosenthal sternly. "It is disgraceful. . . . In *my* nursing-home! The place for which I've given endless credits . . . disgraceful!"

Rosenthal wiped his glasses and made no reply.

"You must call in the leading obstetricians," said M. Kahn. "The best there are. . . . I *will* save this girl. . . . We'll save her, Prince," he added to her husband.

The doctor telephoned to one of his most distinguished masters, and the old man arrived, bringing a friend with him. They approved of all Rosenthal had done, led Kahn aside, away from the husband, and told him that there was no hope.

About midnight, when they were all gathered round the little Princess's bed, a violent delirium set in. Raised up on the pillows, she screamed, her lovely face flushed with the fever, her hair dishevelled. Suddenly she stopped and seized her

These Poor Jews

husband's hand as he stood there beside her. She leaned over to him.

"Do you see that, Peter?" she said to him in a whisper. "All those Jews! They should be burnt!"

He tried to silence her, looking at the others apologetically. But on she went, earnest and ardent:

"Go and fetch my father—tell him everything. . . . My father is the governor. . . . Tell him to leave these Jews to the peasants. . . . Hang them on the trees along the roads. . . . Look at that one, Peter—with the spectacles! He must be killed! All the Jews must be killed!"

Her voice rose in a shrill agony, Kahn and Rosenthal and Mademoiselle Esther stood overwhelmed, in a circle round the dying woman's bed, their eyes filled with tears.

LOUISA, LADY WHITNEY

WHEN I am staying in England long enough, I never fail to visit my friends the Parkers at their Wiltshire place. It is not easy for a Frenchman to picture the secluded felicity of English country-house life. Wiltshire, that beautiful downland countryside, with its gently swelling hills closely clothed with turf, has a plentiful sprinkling of small country-houses, the homes of retired officers and diplomats. The supervision of a small estate, reading, horses, the fond care of house and garden, and visits to antique-shops in Bath, suffice to keep the lives of these unambitious men well filled; they incline to scorn lives more strenuous and restless. It is hardly credible, perhaps, but it is the plain truth that Colonel Parker and his wife, living a couple of hours' journey from London, have never been there since the Armistice.

What are the aims and hidden delights of these tranquil lives? The answer, I think, must be sought in joys of an æsthetic kind. The great pleasures of the year, to the Parkers, are a few pieces of Waterford glass (that rather coarse glass with a bluish sheen) added to their collection, a

well-restored piece of woodwork, or a painting of some corner of their beloved country-side. Visits are paid to one house or another, to admire some new arrangement, a garden path straightened, a piece of tapestry repaired. It is a joy to display the result of so much effort to exacting critics, competent to note and appreciate the two-inch moulding whereby such-and-such a window will be fashioned to be exactly in accord with the original ones. The visitor rejoices in a success as much as the owner. And he goes spreading the good tidings through all Wiltshire: "Reggie has finished his library: it's perfection. . . . Mrs Parker has finished her needlework for the new drawing-room chairs; the blend of colours is excellent." I confess that I relish these innocent enjoyments; after the ardors of continental life, the superb frivolity of this country is always pleasantly restful.

One morning at breakfast I heard Mrs Parker telling the Colonel that Ted Grove would be coming over after luncheon.

"Really?" he said. "That's delightful. . . . There's a man who will interest you," he added, turning to myself.

I understand Colonel Parker well enough to know that the only way of getting a story out of

him is not to ask for it. So I asked no questions. When I joined my host on the lawn at lunch-time, I found with them a vigorous old man, with merry youthful eyes, conspicuous, like many elderly Englishmen, by the contrast between the glow of his sunburnt face and the snowy whiteness of his hair. I put him down as being perhaps sixty, and it was a surprise to learn later from Mrs Parker that he was nearly eighty. She introduced him—"Our neighbour, Sir Edward Grove." And then the conversation interrupted by my arrival was resumed with animation: it was about the topiary art in Elizabethan times.

Mrs Parker belongs to the numerous and active class of gardening Englishwomen. She knows the Latin names of flowers, their habits, their favourite soils. Nobody is more skilled in contriving an herbaceous border in such a way that its successive flowerings edge a path with the changing continuity of a vividly coloured tapestry. She enters a garden with the professional eye of a doctor looking at a patient, or of an officer who divines instinctively the errors made in a regimental mess. She is acknowledged as Wiltshire's great expert on roses. She even carries on postal consultations, and spends whole mornings with nurserymen's catalogues open

Louisa, Lady Whitney

in front of her, composing for her personal friends beds of plants, which, she believes, will be expressive of their individual taste and character.

The talk, then, was of poppies and tulips, and as I had done my best to show a dutiful interest in the herbaceous borders, Sir Edward quietly remarked to Mrs Parker: "Do you think your friend would like to see Lady Whitney's garden?" I had noticed that the Parkers asked after this lady's health in the way that one asks a husband about that of his wife, and knowing the strange complexity of British nomenclature, I had wondered whether she were his mother, or sister, or some relative. Mrs Parker at once replied eagerly that nothing could be more interesting for me.

"All right," said Sir Edward. "But in that case I must hurry off, if I may, and go over ahead of you. Poor Lady Whitney is so old now that any surprise is apt to upset her."

We accompanied him across the fields as far as a small gate opening on to a golf-course, and, bareheaded in the sunshine, the tall old man strode away towards a large mansion visible among surrounding trees, about a mile from the Parkers' house.

"I really should tell you about Lady Whitney,"

remarked Mrs Parker as we strolled back towards the chairs on the lawn.

"That's a long story," said the Colonel.

"You must help me, Jack, when we get to the Sudan," she said. "But to start with," she went on, turning to me, "you must know that Lady Whitney was ninety this year. Can you imagine a woman born at the date of Queen Victoria's coronation? Well, Louisa Cooper was the daughter of a squire down in this part of the country, the youngest of three sisters famed for their beauty. She had some Scottish blood through her mother. Some people considered that her sister Diana, who became Countess of Surrey, came nearer to perfection of beauty, and it is true that Louisa Cooper had a slightly aquiline nose; but her clear blue eyes, fresh complexion, perfect figure, and inborn dignity of movement, made her a famous woman in her generation as soon as she was presented at Court.

"London was astonished, and I think rather pained, when at the age of nineteen she married Lord Whitney, a widower in his fifties. The marriage had been forced on Louisa by her father, rather a tyrant, dazzled by the idea of an alliance with the Whitneys, whose great wealth, as well as

Louisa, Lady Whitney

their ancient lineage, made them supreme in the county. Many of Louisa's women friends (so my mother used to say) thought that Lady Whitney would seek consolars. But they were wrong, although no woman was courted more. At Court, where the Queen treated her with the busy, maternal solicitude that she gave to her family, her servants and her various Dominions, Lady Whitney held a unique place. At Compiègne, where she was annually invited by Napoleon III, she was known as 'the English beauty.' In Vienna, a city then peopled with famous beauties, passers-by stopped to admire her.

"Lord Whitney, a strange despotic person, kept her in luxury and slavery. He insisted on her being always with him, even when he was engaging in sports for which she did not care. Even in shooting-boxes in the Highlands he bade her come down to dinner in queenly gowns and wearing the wonderful jewellery with which he delighted to cover her. He heaped gifts upon her. She liked pictures, and she had only to express admiration of a great painter for him to start stirring up the picture-dealers of both hemispheres. You will see her wonderful Italian primitives in Whitney House. In fact, except for love, freedom, and the society

of young men, he gave her everything that a woman can crave.

"The astonishing thing is she did not seem to resent either the age, or the jealousy, or the tyranny of her husband. I mentioned her Scottish blood. Perhaps it gave her religious scruples and a militant Protestantism. In obedience to her husband she lived in what Englishmen then used to call the 'beau monde,' but she could hardly be said to belong to it. I wonder if you know who Dr Cumming was?"

"I am afraid not."

"He was famous in his day—a clergyman who preached in London on the Apocalypse. He claimed to interpret the prophecies, and foretold the birth of the New Jerusalem for 1867. . . . Lady Whitney was a faithful attender at his sermons, and it used to be said that she used to invite her friends to share her pew in the little chapel in Grove Court, just as other women invited theirs to meet in their boxes at the Opera. . . . You will remember a passage in the Book of Revelation about a woman resplendent with the light of God. When Dr Cumming quoted it, the congregation turned, instinctively perhaps, towards Lady Whitney.

Louisa, Lady Whitney

"When she was about thirty-five her husband had an apoplectic stroke which left him crippled. And as you can imagine, a woman so beautiful was courted by the most remarkable men of the time. She rebuffed them gently, with no display of false modesty, simply remarking that her husband's condition obliged her more than ever to show reserve, and that she intended to devote herself to the education of her children. She had four, three of them boys.

"Lady Whitney entertained only a few trusted friends. One was Mr Disraeli, who used to come and see her nearly every night after he left the House, and wrote to her, as he did to Lady Bradford, letters of extravagant, melancholy fondness. When Lord Whitney died, it was thought that she would soon marry again. But not so. Perhaps she felt that her children would be unhappy with a step-father; perhaps she was encouraged in the acceptance of widowhood by the example and counsel of the Queen. Who can say? The fact remains that she refused men and names of the most brilliant distinction.

"Lady Whitney was getting on for forty when her intimates began to notice the warm attentions paid to her by a young lieutenant, a great sportsman,

country, by ours, and even by Belgium, to whom I think we had by a treaty yielded one province, which in any case didn't belong to us.

"Grove, with a handful of men, was entrusted with the occupation of a kingdom nearly as large as Scotland, and his mission was all the more difficult because it was only semi-official. Mr Gladstone was then in power in England, and Mr Gladstone was sincerely hostile to an imperialist policy. But a Cabinet is not always homogeneous. Some ministers felt the necessity of forestalling a possible French advance, which would have cut off communications between Egypt and South Africa. (And not long afterwards, as it turned out, Marchand's mission showed that these ministers were quite right.) It was one of these dissentients who entrusted young Grove with a deliberately vague mission; and it may well be that Lady Whitney had something to do with the choice, for she had considerable power, not only through her friendship with the Queen, but through her many highly placed admirers in both Houses.

"Grove's instructions were verbal, given to him by the minister in person. . . . The point, as you shall see, is not without significance. . . . We ought to bear a little to the right, Jack, to avoid the

Louisa, Lady Whitney

green at the seventh hole. . . . Two years went by. . . . At first Lady Whitney received a fond letter from Grove every week. Then he plunged into unknown territory and letters became fewer. . . .

“ One day *The Times* published a short message, ten lines or so, telling how Captain Grove’s column had been caught in an ambush near Tawaisha: Lieutenant Winkler and four men had been killed, and the survivors, taking refuge in the small village of Fogo, had hurriedly fortified it and were there besieged by the forces of the rebel Zobeir. This news had come through a soldier disguised as a native, who, thanks to his knowledge of Arabic, had contrived to reach Khartum. Grove’s message stated that he had food and ammunition for a couple of months, but the message was already three weeks old. . . . The plight of these men seemed desperate.

“ To understand the sequel to this, you must remember what I told you just now about Mr Gladstone’s Cabinet. There was Mr Gladstone himself, opposed to all idea of conquest, talking of the Sudanese fanatics as if they were peaceable Liberal voters, but there were also ministers more imperialist than Lord Beaconsfield ever was, who, although linked to the Prime Minister by political

colours, were nevertheless fundamentally opposed to his doctrines.

"Jack will say I'm wrong in blaming my country's policy before a Frenchman. But what I want to express is not blame. Not at all: it is a trait which I admire in some of our statesmen, but a cruel one nevertheless. . . . Listen a moment. . . . More than once during the nineteenth century British Governments have pushed into risky adventures men who were sacrificed in advance. If all went well they were rewarded, and the territory won by their madness was officially annexed. If things went wrong and caused too much outcry in Europe, they were disowned and abandoned to their fate. . . . I say it again: that may seem hard, but the safety of the Empire was then the paramount law, and other nations (your own included) were bitterly hostile to Britain. . . . And it is to our honour that our country always found men ready to play these tremendous stakes. . . .

"In the eyes of the minister who conceived this expedition—I don't want to mention any names—young Grove was one of these pawns to be moved, as a lead, on the African chessboard. But when the Gambler raised the question of a rescue force in the Cabinet, he saw Mr Gladstone's anger

Louisa, Lady Whitney

roused, and heard the table shake under that vigorous hand which felled the trees of Hawarden. The Prime Minister declared that he would not despatch one single squadron against the worthy citizens of the Sudan who were defending their country's liberty. The minister in question saw that the game was up, and resigned himself to the loss of his stake, which consisted of Captain Grove, three N.C.O.'s, and a few men.

"Unfortunately for the Gambler, a certain lady had read the message in *The Times*, a lady well-informed about State secrets, and knowing something about the horrible possibilities of captivity in the hands of the Dervishes. She was determined to save Captain Grove from paying the penalty. . . . You can hardly imagine how difficult and dangerous it was for a woman so well known, and so irreproachable as Lady Whitney in the flowering time of Victorian modesty, to intervene in favour of a young man who was known to be a close friend of hers.

"With you, in France, it is very seldom that a sentimental drama can put an abrupt and absolutely final end to anybody's social existence. And here, even to-day, in these post-War days when people can write anything and say nearly anything—and

Ricochets

can do a bit more than they say—even to-day I don't believe that a statesman gravely compromised in a divorce suit could readily remain in power. Imagine what the strictness of the Victorians must have been! Party leaders like Dilke and Parnell did not survive scandal socially. And women were simply transformed into ghosts. . . . Of course I don't think that in practice the Victorians were more moral than ourselves: they just concealed things, and it was disastrous to be found out.

"I tell you all this so that you may realize that Lady Whitney's intervention meant risking her good name in the eyes of the Queen and the Court circle, and of her own children. But as soon as she heard of the decision reached, she sought an interview with the Gambler.

"He saw her. Nobody knows what passed that day between those two people. Picture the scene! The minister, a cold, polished, distinguished man of affairs—but no, I mustn't describe him, as I said I would not mention his name. And Lady Whitney, very resolute, fixing the man with blue eyes which *could* be very stern. Grove says that there was mention of reasons of State, of a certain conversation at Whitney House of which a verbatim account was extant, of a gracious sovereign who

Louisa, Lady Whitney

insisted on her name being respected, even below the twentieth degree of latitude, of a powerful newspaper-owner who was at Lady Whitney's beck and call, and finally of a document which would be made public if the expedition was not saved. . . . No doubt each of the two was gauging the other's strength. The minister, a moving orator, must have depicted the public scandal and its consequences. The woman must have braced herself to leave no loophole and to make it clearly understood that she would play every card in her hand."

"You ought to say," interrupted Colonel Parker, "that in his own heart the minister was not hostile. Only the day before he had struggled to get the rescue force and yielded only to the Cabinet's opposition. I daresay he was thinking about the value of this new ally as he listened to her, and was wondering if she would be strong enough to bend a government."

"Anyhow," Mrs Parker went on, "whatever the exact course of the discussion, it struck the Gambler as of sufficient interest for him to go immediately and call on the Prime Minister, and to threaten him with a spectacular resignation if orders were not sent to Cairo for Grove's rescue. It was a moment of party instability, when a single

resignation may be enough to compel an election in very unfavourable circumstances. . . . I should not like to insinuate that a Cabinet's policy can be transformed by such basely utilitarian motives. . . . But nevertheless, a few days later, some small, well-armed vessels set off from Khartum; and amongst the consequences were the rescue of Grove, the wrath of the Mahdi, and later, perhaps, the death of Gordon.

"Grove returned to London as a hero. The Gambler, who was also a sportsman, gave him the D.S.O., a decoration then rare for a captain in his twenties. The fashionable world scanned the list of the year's debutantes for one who would share this gallant officer's name. He was besieged by the fair. The War Office and the Government of India quarrelled for him. He became—but there he is! Do you see him, Jack? He's just opened the orchard gate. . . ."

"But what a quick ending to your story, Mrs Parker! I want to know more. . . . Did he really marry one of the debutantes? Did he remain true to Lady Whitney?"

"He has been true to her for forty-five years, although she has never consented to marry him. . . ."

I was going to ask another question, but Sir Edward Grove was now too near.

"At last!" he said. "You didn't walk so well as I did. Was Parker the slow-coach? Well, Lady Whitney is waiting for you in the park. . . . You'll see her yourself," he continued, turning to me; "you'll see how beautiful she is."

I admired the boyish enthusiasm of his voice. He had the shy delight of a young man introducing his fiancée to friends. Mrs Parker looked at me with a smile.

We went in through the little gate, and after coming slowly through the orchard we walked up a splendid avenue of lime-trees. About half-way along it we met an old lady, very erect, slim and graceful, wearing one of those wide straw hats which one sees in Winterhalter's pictures, and leaning on a tall cane. Her black dress was sprinkled with tiny white flowers. She walked slowly, but with an air of authority and dignity which would have made her stand out anywhere. Her voice was clear. When she was told that I was French, she spoke to me about the Emperor Napoleon III, and about Galliffet, whom she had known well. Then she mentioned William II.

"He was an intolerable little boy!" she said. "And how he infuriated poor King Edward!"

"Did you know King Edward well?" I asked.

Ricochets

"Know him?" she echoed with surprise. "I knew him all my life. It was I who taught him to dance. . . . He was most industrious. . . . He used to count, *one, two, three—one, two, three*—out loud. . . ."

And then, as General Grove had stepped aside for a moment from our group to point out a tree to Mrs Parker, she leaned towards me for an instant.

"Have you had a talk with Ted?" she asked. "Isn't he interesting? Oh, there aren't many men like that nowadays!"

And she, in her turn, spoke these words with youthful enthusiasm. Looking more boldly at her face, framed in its white tresses, I saw that her beauty was not dead, and that her blue eyes, a little stern, were gleaming.

"Lady Whitney," said Mrs Parker, "I really think you should lop your limes."

SWITCHBACK RAILWAY

BONNIVET was my senior by five or six years (said Maufras), and his career was so rapid and dazzling that really I regarded him more as a patron than a friend. I felt both respect and gratitude towards him. For it was he who took me on to his personal staff, from a very modest position, when he became Minister of Public Works, and then, when the ministry fell, shunted me into an admirably "safe" job in the service.

When he returned to power he went to the Colonial Office. At that time I held a pleasant post in Paris, and asked him to leave me there; but we continued to be on affectionate terms, and he and his wife frequently sat at our table, as we did at theirs. Nelly Bonnavet was a woman of about forty, still pretty, adored by her husband, the perfect wife for a minister. I had then been married for ten years, and you know how happy Madeleine and I have always been.

Early in June that year, the Bonnavets invited us to dine at one of the restaurants in the Bois. It was one of those first days of real summer, one of those days which can hardly be found save in

Ricochets

Paris—mild, buoyant, balancing miraculously between excessive warmth and dangerous chill. There were six of us. It was a cheerful evening, and when the waiters began to prowl round us, extinguishing the lamps as if accidentally, and having to relight them at once, we were in no mind to break up. Bonnivet was in capital humour and suggested a visit to the fair at Neuilly. When he is in office he likes playing Haroun-al-Raschid, and hearing people murmur as he passes: "Look! That's Bonnivet!"

Three middle-aged couples vainly trying to find the savour of childhood in childish games make rather a depressing spectacle. By various games of chance we won macaroons, spun-glass boats, and gingerbread animals; the three men shot at revolving pipes and egg-shells uplifted on a drooping jet of water. And then we reached a circular railway which, after one or two circuits in the open air, entered a tunnel. Bonnivet suggested a trip on this; Madeleine did not seem to think it very amusing, nor the cushions very clean, but she did not want to be a wet-blanket, and we took our tickets. In the confusion of departure our party was bisected, and I found myself alone in one of the compartments with Nelly Bonnivet.

Switchback Railway

The little train whizzed round at a great speed, and the curves were so constructed that the passengers were thrown against each other. At the first turning Madame Bonnivet nearly fell into my arms. Just then the tunnel plunged us in darkness, and I am at a complete loss to explain just what happened during the next few seconds. Sometimes our bodies act without the mind's control. But the fact remains that I felt Nelly lying across my knees, and that I was fondling her as a young soldier toys with the girl he has taken to the fair. I sought her lips, still without knowing it, and just as I found them, without meeting any resistance, we were out in the light again. Instinctively we broke away with extreme abruptness, glancing at each other with embarrassed amazement.

I remember then trying to understand the expression in Nelly Bonnivet's face. She put her hair straight, looking at me gravely, and in silence. The moment of awkwardness was very brief. Already the train was being braked down, and a few seconds later we were joining Bonnivet, Madeleine and the third couple on the circular platform.

"That's really too childish," said Bonnivet. "I think it's time we went to bed."

Ricochets

Madeleine seconded, and the party broke up at the Porte Maillot. As I kissed Nelly's hand I looked her in the eye; she was chatting gaily to Madeleine and went off without a sign.

I couldn't sleep. This unexpected adventure was disturbing the sober equilibrium of my life. I had never been a lady-killer, and certainly not at all since my marriage. I loved Madeleine wholeheartedly, and between us there was loving and complete confidence. Of Bonnivet I was fond, and sincerely grateful to him as well. The devil of it was that nevertheless I was burning with anxiety to see Nelly again, and to know what that look of hers meant after we drew apart. Was it surprise? Or grievance? You know how fatuous the most modest of men can be in their hidden hearts. Here was I, imagining a long, silent passion suddenly finding expression by a favouring chance. Beside me lay Madeleine, quietly breathing. . . .

Next morning, fortunately, I was very busy, and hardly had time to think of this odd little story. But on the following day I was called to the telephone.

"This is the Colonial Office," said a voice.

Switchback Railway

"Hold on, please. The Minister wishes to speak to you. . . . One moment, please!"

A shudder ran down my spine. Bonnivet never telephoned himself. Invitations and answers were sent by our wives. It could only be about this silly adventure. . . .

"Hullo!" came Bonnivet's voice suddenly: "Oh, is that you, Maufras? Could you come over and see me here? Yes . . . it's urgent. . . . I'll tell you all about it when you come. . . . All right, you'll be over soon."

I hung up the receiver. . . . So Nelly was one of those damnable women who lead men on (for I could have sworn that she fell across me deliberately that night), and then go and complain to their husbands: "You know, you're quite wrong in trusting Bernard. . . . He's not the good friend you think he is. . . ." A hateful breed! As I looked round for a taxi to go to Bonnivet's I wondered what was going to happen. A duel? I should have liked it, if only as a simple solution, but how could it be proposed? Nobody had ever fought duels for such reasons since the War. No, Bonnivet was doubtless going to overwhelm me with reproaches, humiliate me, and make it clear that our relations were at an end. It was the end

of a valuable friendship, and no doubt it would be also the end of my career, for Bonnivet was powerful. Everybody was saying he would soon be Premier. And how was I to explain this mysterious rupture to Madeleine?

These thoughts, and others more sinister, were seething within me as I drove towards the ministry. I came to realize why suicide is regarded as an escape by luckless men placed in a position too exacting for their courage.

For a short time I waited in an ante-room full of negroes and ushers. My heart was beating irregularly. I gazed at a fresco of harvesting Annamites. At last an usher called out my name and I rose. Bonnivet's door confronted me. Should I let him speak? Or should I anticipate the scene by a full confession?

It was he who rose and took me by both hands. I was struck by the cordiality of his welcome. Perhaps he had been intelligent enough to see how fortuitous and involuntary the incident had been?

"First of all," he said, "I must apologize again for fetching you across at such short notice. But you'll see that a decision has to be reached. Listen. . . . You know that Nelly and I are going off next month for a trip to West Africa. . . . A journey

Switchback Railway

of inspection for myself, and one of pleasure and discovery for her. . . . I have decided to take not only officials from the ministry, but also a few friends and a few writers, as Frenchmen must learn something about their Empire. . . . Now I confess that I hadn't thought of suggesting it to you, because you are neither in my ministry nor a writer—and in any case you have your own job. But Nelly pointed out to me yesterday that our journey will coincide, almost to a week, with your leave, that you and Madeleine would be more pleasant and intimate companions for her than strangers, and that perhaps you might be tempted by this opportunity of seeing Africa under really unusual conditions. . . . I quite agree with her; so if you accept, you and your wife will be of the party. . . . But I really must know at once, because my office is now completing the lists and programmes. . . .”

I thanked him with relief, and asked for a few hours to consult my wife. At lunch-time I told Madeleine of the offer, and we both tried to find some way of declining without offence. We did not go to Africa. I know that Nelly Bonnivert, ever since, refers to me without malice, but a little ironically.

POOR HENRIETTE

IT was a surprise when Robert telephoned to suggest our meeting somewhere. What could we have to talk about? I have a fond feeling for his wife, Henriette. Robert is merely an intelligent, cynical connoisseur of good wines and light-of-
loves, and I have never understood the ingenuous adoration which poor Henriette lavishes on him after fifteen years of an unhappy marriage.

He came to my house that same day.

"My dear fellow," he said, jovially, lighting a cigar, "you must do me a favour. . . . Don't be alarmed: I am not going to ask you for money, or that you should take any active steps. . . . But you are Henriette's trusted adviser, and she has absolute trust in you. And I must say she's right: your ideas about life may not be mine, but they're not unreasonable, and they suit a quiet little temperament like Henriette's to perfection. . . . Besides, I know by experience that you are discreet, and sensible enough to keep your friendships in water-tight compartments. You won't let a husband's confidences slip through to a wife's ears. And that's what makes me appeal to you."

Poor Henriette

He took a puff at his Havana, and continued, with an affectionate, quizzical glance:

“ Well, the fact is, that when I was flying back from Malmö after a lecture-tour, I met a woman—or rather a girl—in the aeroplane. And I’m quite boyishly in love with her. Those Nordics, when they’re beautiful, make all our dark beauties pale into nothing. . . . The young lady, for her part, held out certain hopes. . . . Oh, nothing happened: Circumstances were not exactly favourable. Aeroplanes don’t give the same chances for active approaches as liners do. But I was given to understand that if I came back I should be welcomed. . . . Well, my dear fellow, you know what I am. I’ve never been able to resist temptation, especially when there is a slight doubt of the possibility of achievement. There is a joy of conquest which virtuous men like yourself will never experience. . . . So I have had myself invited again, for next winter, by the committee which brought me there that first time. . . . It wasn’t very easy, as they like to vary their programmes, but I managed to convince them in the end. . . . The only question is poor Henriette—and that’s where you come in. . . . ”

“ I really don’t think,” I began, “ that between you and your wife I can—— ”

Ricochets

"Wait a moment! I'm not going to ask you to do anything prejudicial to Henriette. . . . But as a matter of fact she has been very much opposed to the idea of this fresh tour. . . . She would like me to take her with me . . . and of course that's impossible. Either she would spoil my enjoyment, or she would be its helpless and distressed witness. A painful position, which must be avoided, for her own sake as much as mine. . . . Now, what I want you to do, as a friend, is perfectly simple. Henriette will tell you about this project, as she tells you about everything. . . . Tell her that it is always essential for a writer to show himself publicly—especially abroad. Explain how expensive and poorly paid these tours are, and how days are wasted with boring luncheons and official receptions. . . . In fact, fill her with a distaste for coming with me, and at the same time dissuade her from holding me back. . . . Remember, it will make me much nicer to her when I get back. . . . I'm very fond of poor Henriette. . . . But you will admit that, even with the most harmonious couples, an occasional matrimonial holiday is needed."

He elaborated this theme for over an hour, while drummed my fingers on the table, for he was

Poor Henriette

keeping me from my work. At last he left, with no promise from myself.

By an odd coincidence, Henriette rang me up on the telephone that very afternoon.

"Listen, Bertrand," she said. "If you've nothing particular to do this afternoon, could you come round to see me? You shall have a cup of tea, and perhaps I shall ask your advice about something."

I found her playing Bach, and was struck by her youthful look. Henriette can hardly be less than forty, but that afternoon, in the kindly evening light, wearing a bright dress with a low-cut neck, she looked barely thirty. She gave me her usual warm welcome, played a favourite *étude* for me, and rang for tea so that we should be left undisturbed.

"Bertrand, my dear," she said at last. "You can do me a great favour. . . . But—but asking it is going to force me to make a terribly rash confidence. . . ."

"You know, Henriette——" I began.

"You are the only person in the world I trust, Bertrand. But this is very serious for me. . . . Bertrand—I have a lover. He's a man you would dislike: first because he is my lover, and then

Ricochets

because he's quite different from you. . . . He is young, much younger than I am. A Slav, studying in Paris, handsome as a god, a lovely dancer. . . . Cultured? Yes, but rather too pleased with himself. . . . Rather common. . . . Slightly crazy. . . . In fact, not your sort at all. But I love him, and he makes me happy."

"And Robert?" I said.

"Robert knows nothing about it, of course. . . . Robert turns a pitying eye on poor little Henriette, who sadly tolerates her husband's infidelities, and yet cannot free herself from that irresistible man. . . . In any case, Robert's thoughts are less on me than on a meeting with a certain Danish lady."

"What? Do you know about that?" I said.

"I've known a long time," she said. "And how do *you* know about it?"

"Because Robert came and told me about it this morning."

"And you weren't saying a word about it! Oh, what sort of a friend are you, Bertrand? But I'm delighted to find you so well-informed. It makes my request easier. . . . Listen: it is essential that Robert should leave for a fortnight's trip in October. That will enable me to take a cruise in the *Ægean* with Vladimir."

Poor Henriette

"Let me say again, Henriette, that Robert is only too anxious to go. But he feels——"

"One moment, Bertrand! I *know* that he wants to go—he's told me so. But I protested and wept and implored, and I think I may have slightly weakened his determination."

"I don't understand, Henriette. Why this play-acting?"

"Because a smiling acquiescence would have robbed him of half his longing, and might even have struck him as suspicious. . . . What I want you to do, Bertrand, is first of all to strengthen him in the idea that this journey is valuable for his career, essential for the fame and glory which are so dear to me. And then, that as regards myself, if Robert wants to remain the master in his own house as he always has been, he must fight down his sense of pity. . . . If he yields once, he is lost. . . . Make that clear to him. . . . And suggest that, to amuse and console me in his absence, a short cruise. . . . You'd be an angel, Bertrand. . . ."

"Poor Robert!" I said.

"Yes," she said, gravely. "Poor Robert!"

THE CUCKOO CLOCK

I WAS invited by General Bramble to come and spend Christmas with him in the country. "This year," he wrote, "I am only asking my sister and her husband, Lord Tulloch, so it won't be particularly cheerful and I offer my apologies; but if you aren't afraid of solitude or the English winter, we shall be delighted to see you and talk over old times."

I knew that, during the past year, my friends had suffered the loss of their daughter, a girl of eighteen, who had been killed by a fall in the hunting-field. I felt sorry for them; I was anxious to see them; I accepted.

Lord and Lady Tulloch were a little alarming, but once I got to know them I was glad that they were there. General Bramble can sit for hours on end beside the fire, smoking his pipe without saying one word. Mrs Bramble sews or works, likewise in silence. Lord Tulloch is a pleasant chatterbox, who has been an ambassador in various countries and, what is surprising, has apparently seen something of them; his wife is plain in rather an attractive way, and dresses in an appropriately modest style.

The Cuckoo Clock

Grief has furrowed Mrs Bramble's face, but she did not mention her bereavement. Only on the night of my arrival, when I was going up to bed, she stopped for a moment before the room next to mine. "This was her room," she said, and looked the other way.

Christmas Eve we spent in the library, with a log-fire blazing up high into the chimney, and only candles to light the large room. Through the latticed windows, in the moonlight, we could see the white garden and the snow fluttering down. The General smoked his pipe; Mrs Bramble was working; Lord Tulloch talked about Christmas Eve.

"Fifty years ago," he said, "many of the old peasants in my part of the country still believed that on this night the animals have human speech. I remember my nurse telling me the story of a sceptical farm-hand who hid in the stable to test the legend for himself. On the first stroke of midnight one of the horses turned its head to a neighbour. 'We'll have a job of work in a week or so,' said the horse. 'That we shall,' answered the other, 'and he's a heavy man, that.' 'Heavy enough,' went on the first horse, 'and it is a steep hill up to the

cemetery. . . .’ And a week later that farm-hand died.”

“Huh!” said the General. “Did your nurse really know the man?”

“Very well indeed,” said Lord Tulloch. “He was her brother.”

He remained silent for a time. I watched the leaping flames crackling in the hearth, like flags in a storm. The General did not stir. Mrs Bramble’s needle was building up long points of light colour on the canvas.

At last Lord Tulloch spoke again.

“In Sweden,” he said, “I have often seen the peasants in Dalecarlia preparing supper for the ghosts. There, on Christmas Night, the dead return to the houses where they spent their lives; and the farm people, before going to bed, kindle a large fire, light fresh candles, lay spotless white cloths on the table, dust the chairs, and make way for the phantoms. Next morning a sprinkling of earth is found on the floor, plates and tumblers have been moved, and a strange smell floats in the air.”

“Huh!” said the General quietly.

It was tactless of Lord Tulloch, I thought, and I glanced at Mrs Bramble. She seemed undisturbed, but I was anxious to change the topic.

The Cuckoo Clock

"My own idea of Christmas Eve," I said, "is more like Shakespeare's. Do you remember—

*'And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm.'*"

"But we, on the other hand, know that Shakespeare is wrong," said Lady Tulloch, with a serious air. "Edward, dear, will you tell them about our Tulloch Castle experience?"

"I shall be glad to hear it," I said.

"Well," began Lord Tulloch, "it was exactly five years ago to-night, the Christmas Eve of 1928. I had a slight headache, and as it was a beautiful crisp night, I thought I would take a short stroll in the open air, and I went out of doors. It was about midnight. In front of the gates of my grounds I turned along the narrow road, which has a fairly high hedge on either hand; that night it was well lighted by a very bright moon and a starry sky. After walking along for half a mile or so, I caught sight, some way ahead, of a dark-coloured smear running across the road. As I came near it, I saw to my surprise that it was blood, and looking round to see where it could come from, I found that the hedge at this point

formed a kind of recess, within which a body was lying motionless. I went up to it; it was a corpse. I ran home and called the servants. Sending some to inform the police, I ordered the rest to bring torches and follow me. We went along the same road, and walked on for a long time—too long, it seemed to me. But there was nothing to be seen, and I searched in vain for the smear of blood. At last, after two miles at least, I said: ‘It’s impossible. I certainly didn’t come so far as this. We must have passed the place. Let’s go back.’ And back we came. ‘Listen,’ I said. ‘It should be quite easy to find the place again: it is just where the hedge forms a kind of recess.’ But none of the servants could remember having seen the place I described. Again we followed along the hedge; as far as we could go, we found its straightness unbroken.”

Lord Tulloch paused for a moment. Outside, the snow was still falling, slowly and implacably. There was no sound but the faint *siss* of the silk thread passing through the canvas and the crackling of the fire.

“Was it hallucination?” I asked.

The General turned his head in my direction, but remained silent.

“For a long time I thought so,” said Lord Tulloch; “my questioning of police and passers-by and neighbours was all in vain. No crime had been committed that night on the Tulloch road; and there had been no accident. . . . Well, four years went by, and I had long admitted that some brief, passing insanity had upset my senses that night, when a friend of mine, a professional archæologist, sent me a letter which gave me great satisfaction. ‘Dear Tulloch,’ it ran. ‘In the course of some researches this morning at the British Museum I discovered a curious fact which clearly has some connexion with a strange story which you told me last time I had the pleasure of spending a week-end with you. Having occasion to look through some old local newspapers of your part of the world, I found that on December 24th, 1828, at a spot six hundred yards from Tulloch Castle, Sir John Lacy, a Catholic gentleman going alone to Midnight Mass, was attacked by highway robbers. The malefactors had hidden behind the hedge, which then formed covering angles at several points, in order to keep watch for passers-by. It was in one such place that they also concealed the body, after they had stripped their victim of valuables. In consequence of this affair, the Lord Lieutenant of

the county ordered these angles to be demolished, and from that time the hedges along the road have been kept straight.' ”

“ I wish you could have seen Edward's delight when he read me that letter ! ” said Lady Tulloch.

“ No wonder, ” said the General gravely.

“ Yes, indeed, no wonder, ” agreed Mrs. Bramble.

I looked at them with amazement.

“ Why ? ” I said. “ Do you believe that the dead man returned there for the centenary of his murder ? ”

“ Don't you think so ? ” asked Lord Tulloch with anxiety.

The General and Mrs Bramble looked at me so reprovingly that I held my tongue. And I reflected that no doubt these stories about animals talking, and suppers for ghosts, likewise found willing shelter in these responsive souls. I rose, and asked if I might go up to bed.

A great pine-wood fire was burning in my room. The air was laden with a thin film of smoke, and outside, on the window-panes, one discerned the soft cotton-wool of the snow. When my candle was blown out, the flickering flames of the fire made visible a warm, luminous mist. I was so hot that I could not sleep. My mind turned to strange

The Cuckoo Clock

stories. Quite soon, in the room next door, a cuckoo-clock sounded midnight. I was tired, and rather on edge, but at the same time I felt something pleasant in this sleeplessness; it was rather as if some mysterious, impalpable presence had suffused my room with an air of intimacy and fondness. I heard the cuckoo-clock announce every hour until dawn. Then at last I fell asleep.

When I came down to breakfast next morning, a little late, Mrs Bramble was already seated at the table, with its load of porridge and Finnan haddock and marmalade, in the long oak-panelled dining-room. She asked me if I had slept well.

"To be quite frank," I said, "I didn't sleep much. But it was not unpleasant, and the cuckoo kept me company."

"What!" said the General sharply. "You heard a cuckoo? Do you hear that, Edith?" He spoke forcibly, turning towards his wife.

"Why . . . yes," I said, taken aback at the tone in which he spoke these words—the longest speech I ever heard from his lips. Then I noticed that Mrs Bramble was looking at me with strained intensity, her eyes full of tears.

"I should explain . . ." she said. "There really is a cuckoo-clock in the room next to yours. It

Ricochets

was given to my girl as a present when she was quite small, but she was always very fond of it and used to wind it herself every night. Since our darling was taken from us, nobody has touched the cuckoo-clock, and nobody ever will; and so we supposed it would be silent for always. But last night . . . well, last night, you see, was Christmas Eve. . . .”

AN ENERGETIC CHIN

I AM always pleased when I find that Lady Merrick is to be my neighbour at the dinner-table. She is no longer young, but her features are still well-knit, her skin is clear, and middle-age has endowed her with that indefinable smile in her glance which is the sign of a restful scepticism.

Sir Joseph Merrick had a distinguished career in the Colonies before he obtained a post with the League of Nations, which was all the more generously remunerated as no individual government knew exactly who was paying him. Lady Merrick lived with him for many years in India, Burma, and South Africa. She knows local dialects, and association with primitive people has given her solidly based ideas about men and women.

On this particular evening we had opposite us a superb English colonel, conspicuous for one of those square chins, jutting boldly forward from the face, which is the best possible recommendation in the British Army.

Lady Merrick and I looked with fitting admiration at the man with the energetic chin. When he

Ricochets

opened his lips everybody at our end of the table stopped talking to listen. Conscious of his debt to his chin, he told cruel stories with formidable calmness.

"Last year," he said, "I took my wife along on one of my journeys up-country in East Africa. We were entertained by one negro chief, very much a man-of-the-world; and after accepting the customary gifts from my hands, he asked my wife to choose some token for herself from amongst his tribal wealth. Winifred had just been pointing out to me a bracelet worn by one of the sovereign's wives—a heavily fashioned object, but rather beautifully designed. The interpreter explained to the chief that the English lady would like to have a similar ornament. This apparently embarrassed the negroes, and the interpreter told us that the bracelet had been fashioned actually on the woman's wrist, that it could not be taken off, and that there was no other like it. My wife replied, of course, that it did not matter. But the chief remained preoccupied, and in a moment or two whispered a few words to his minister, who led the woman aside. There was a silence. Then a cry was heard, and the minister returned with the bracelet, which the chief, with an air of delight, handed to my

An Energetic Chin

wife. Just as Winifred took it, she saw that it was smeared with blood."

"And what had the negroes done?" asked the Colonel's neighbour.

"Why, they had cut off the woman's hand."

"Oh, horrible! And you accepted the bracelet?"

"Well," said the Colonel coldly, "the harm was done, and it was well meant. Why offend a friendly potentate?"

"Not much sentiment in this fellow!" I commented to Lady Merrick under my breath.

She gave me an amused glance.

"Wait until after dinner," she said, "and I'll tell you how I came to know this energetic person."

Whereupon she talked about the Prince of Wales, as women do when they want to change the conversation. ✓

.

After dinner I led Lady Merrick as far as possible from the Colonel and asked for the promised story.

"Well," she said, "it happened early in my husband's career. He was then a resident magistrate in a remote district of Burma. The place contained about a dozen officials, a clergyman, a squadron of cavalry, and no other European. And, as you may

guess, the relations between strangers in so small a community soon became like the relations between friends in a large town. Indeed, I can think of women who suffer more from boredom in London or Paris than I did in that frontier station. I reigned supreme over the cavalry; I was the subalterns' confidante and the colonel's right hand, and I did my best to keep order and confidence supreme in that little corner of the Empire.

"It was there that I saw the arrival of that soldier with the powerful chin who was talking so well just now. We came from the same county, and had been neighbours in childhood. He reminded me that we had played together long ago, that I had called him Archie and he had called me Mary. I passed him on to the most resourceful of his fellow-officers, who, within forty-eight hours, found him a bungalow and a wife. Many officers there, you know, marry native women for the duration of their service."

"Ours do likewise," I said. "In Morocco some officials marry Berber women, and in Tonkin they have their *congais*."

"Well, Lieutenant Woodman took a *congai* like everyone else. He bought some furniture and mats and set up house. I had given him useful advice,

An Energetic Chin

for at that time he used to ask for it. He came to tea with me nearly every day. I would meet him again on the tennis-courts, and I did what I could to explain the people and ways of the country. Like so many of our countrymen, he was naïve and lazy. I saw at once that he would never learn the Burmese language, which I spoke quite well myself. I also saw that he was melancholy, and that he must have left behind a fiancée or a mistress in England. So I used to invite him rather more often than I did the other men.

“At first he was almost embarrassingly grateful, but after quite a short time he refused an invitation twice, then thrice, and then he disappeared for weeks on end, until he was one of those men who are only visible on official occasions, like the King’s Birthday or Christmas Day. I questioned some of my friends, and their diagnosis was curt—‘A lost man.’

“In the East, you know, these things are swift. A European is flung abruptly into the midst of a sensuous and nonchalant civilization. If he has a streak of weakness in his make-up, he is open to temptation. The childishness of the native women amuses him. He longs to escape. He shuns his friends and colleagues. For a time he keeps up

doesn't care. Everything I give her is left lying about and gets stolen by servants. Why do you try to find fault with her? She hasn't a complicated mind, I grant you, but she's a loving and selfless woman. I prefer that, and I've a right to.'

.

"After an hour of this farrago I saw that his plight was serious. I left the handsome Archie and went off in search of his colonel. I found him playing tennis. He was an old hand and grasped the situation at once. Next day he joined my husband and myself and we went into the general situation in our district. We saw that it was essential to send an officer and ten men to investigate the doings of a certain bandit in the hill-country villages. The officer should be one of junior rank, and Woodman was the very man. And so I was able to pay daily visits for a week to the bungalow and see a loving little wife. She was greatly flattered by this interest on the part of the wife of the Resident Sahib. I had a great advantage over her in being able to talk in the vernacular, and also in being a woman. Even when one woman comes from Sussex and the other from Burma, they will always have a sense of complicity. When I had

won her confidence I was able to speak about our hero.

“ ‘You’re lucky,’ I said. ‘Woodman Sahib is a generous white man.’

“ ‘He is the stupidest white man I know,’ she said. ‘Twice he has given me a watch, and both times I sold them. Now he wants to give me another.’

“ ‘But you respect him, don’t you?’

“ ‘Who respects a fool?’

“After which it was easy to ask whether she would agree, for a certain number of rupees, and another watch, to leave her lord and master. . . .

“And when the expedition returned Lieutenant Woodman rushed to see me, and I had a talk with him which lasted from the siesta until dinner-time, and in the course of which this unsentimental young man was twice in tears. . . .”

She looked over towards the handsome colonel at the other end of the room. He was discoursing energetically on the European situation to a silent, admiring group.

“I’m certain,” she said, “that he is explaining to them that what our Government lacks is strong men, men with no yellow streak, and that if Colonel

Woodman could deal with the affairs of the Empire, they would be better handled."

"You're very hard!" I exclaimed. "Just because a subaltern of twenty is duped by a *congaï* . . ."

"But you're just a man!" she said. "When you come to town I'll introduce you to Mrs Woodman. And you'll see that one *congaï* is as good as another, in Burma or in Kensington."

A MISUNDERSTANDING

WHEN I was just out of my teens I used often to visit an old friend of my grandfather, M. Neuville by name. It is uncommon for a youth to find whole-hearted and enduring pleasure in the society of an octogenarian, but it was neither pity nor selfish interest which made me seek the company of M. Neuville. It was the intelligence of his conversation and the authenticity of his anecdotes. As a diplomat, a favoured ambassador of the Duc de Broglie, he had known the figures of the Second Empire and served the founder of the Third Republic. Along with Galliffet and the Marquis du Lau, he had been one of the early friends in France of the Prince of Wales, and, like them, by giving precedence to national feeling over party bitterness, he had, in his later years as a diplomat, helped to build the bridge between the English heir-apparent and the new Republican leaders. No one could talk better about M. Thiers, or Marshal MacMahon, or M. Jules Grévy. Furthermore, it was a pleasure to look at M. Neuville, for I really believe that I never set eyes on a more handsome and vigorous old man.

My grandfather had told me that Edmond Neuville was a famous Don Juan in his day. Every period has its collector of conquests of this kind; and his triumphs become more frequent and more easy, as his attentions become to women a kind of badge of charm and beauty. Women overlooked by him feel affronted, and before long are making it a point of honour to be his. Such a man, in the eighteenth century, was the Duc de Richelieu, or Byron in the England of 1812; and in the France of 1860 there was Edmond Neuville.

When I knew him he had long retired from diplomacy, and lived in Paris in a small house in the Rue d'Astorg, with a courtyard in front of it, and packed inside with objects brought back from his successive posts. The plump, yellow satin ottomans were draped with Cashmere shawls, Chinese embroideries, white bearskins. The dim light from the windows was further dulled by claret-coloured velvet hangings, heavy with trimmings and fringed hems. On a rosewood table stood a row of yellowing photographs, showing handsome women dressed in old-fashioned styles, in frames fancifully decorated with precious stones. I would often pick up one of these and ask M. Neuville to tell me the story of its subject. "Ah—

A Misunderstanding

Maria Pavlovna!" he would begin; "a most likeable creature. . . ." And he would sketch a picture of the Russian Court about 1869. Or, as I touched another frame: "Lady Barchester?" he would murmur. "Yes, those were the days when women played a great and hidden part in English politics. . . ." And he would tell me about Lord Salisbury, with whom he had negotiated.

Over the mantelpiece hung a picture by Alfred de Dreux, showing Neuville himself on horseback, at the age of thirty or thereabouts. In the strong-willed, sensual face, with its frame of black beard, one could easily recognize the features of my aged friend, which still had that same frame, now turned white. Wearing a soft straw hat, a short black jacket, a gold-coloured waistcoat and close-fitting white trousers, strapped under the insteps, this horseman was cantering in an Italian park. Below him, on the marble mantelpiece, Chinese jade and blue china framed a basket of artificial fruits.

Until 1907 M. Neuville seemed to be in very good health. During the winter I called on him at Hyères, where he had a villa, and he walked me through his orange grove at such a speed that I could hardly keep pace with him. But on his

return to Paris in the spring there was a sudden change; he turned disturbingly thin and was visibly feebler. One day, with the utmost simplicity, he told me that on the previous morning he had asked his doctor for the truth about his state of health, and that he had at the most only three months to live. He begged me not to alter my demeanour towards him, and to come and see him daily. But I was not to mention his illness, which was of no interest, as nothing could be done for it.

During the next few weeks I could see his suffering and his weakness increasing. He devoted himself to some mysterious work, and before long I discovered that he was himself writing addresses for the formal letters which would announce his death. With his systematic punctilio, he was afraid of some mistake or oversight in this last ceremony of social usage. He painstakingly selected the music for the funeral service, the details of which he arranged. His constantly revised will speedily became a manuscript of a hundred pages, for he was determined to leave a memento to each one of his friends, and that each should have some object that would give pleasure. In the end it seemed as if the approach of death, instead of inspiring him with a natural indifference towards the living,

A Misunderstanding

was actually reviving a politeness which had once been professional and had become an instinct in him.

As I was a witness of these mournful tasks, he associated me in them, and on several occasions I wrote to his dictation fragments of the famous will, which he subsequently copied out again in quite a firm handwriting. So it happened that one evening, after working with him later than I expected, I suddenly looked at my watch and was surprised at having lost count of the hour.

"Heavens!" I exclaimed. "I have to dress and go to dine with the Clermont de Sazy's. . . ."

"Where did you say?" he asked, leaning towards me, for he was slightly deaf in one ear.

I repeated the name.

"Madame Henri Clermont?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "The Clermonts of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré."

"I don't know where she lives," he said. "Is she still as beautiful as ever?"

"Who?" I asked in surprise. "Madame Clermont de Sazy? You know that she must be over seventy, sir; but certainly she obviously must have been beautiful. . . ."

"But is she not very like Madame de Thianges?"

he said, with a fervour which momentarily brought the grace of youth into his aged face.

I could not help smiling.

"Perhaps," I said, after a moment. "Of course the difference of age is such that any comparison. . . ."

"True," he murmured, "true. . . . It is so hard for me to imagine her as an old woman. What is she like? Do tell me. . . ."

"What can I tell, sir? Her eyes are youthful, and she has that indefinable roguishness, which I always find affecting, of women who have been pretty, and so have been used to getting what they want without effort, just by their physical presence; even in old age they retain a free and fascinating ease of manner. . . . But you have more knowledge than I of that type of feminine old age. I remember you spoke about it yourself once—about Madame de Pourtalès."

"Is she really like that?" he said. "Well, fate must have treated her better as a woman than it did when she was a girl. . . . When I knew her she was adorably beautiful, but also poor, and very unhappy. . . . But you are in a hurry," he added, "and I've already told you too many old stories."

I told him that I would not let him overlook

A Misunderstanding

this one, and would ask for it some other day. I dined at the Clermont de Sazy's, and observed them more curiously than usual. The husband bored me. I knew that he owned factories in the provinces, made bicycles and sewing-machines, and was one of the richest men in France. It was his father who had built up the fortune; and he, no doubt, was the conspicuous man of the family. Henri Clermont himself had always lived in Paris, an amateur in industry and in art, administering his factories at Montbéliard through engineers and remaining content with drawing his dividends, which were large. He owned a château in Touraine, a villa in the Midi, and a yacht in which he took an annual cruise in the Mediterranean. That evening he irritated me. Not that his features were unpleasing: his massive face was still handsome, and well set off by his short stubble of white hair. But his purse-proud vanity was too blatant, his patronage too contemptuous, his air of authority too all-embracing. He prided himself on talking only about his pictures and his travels, and all his friends felt that "bicycle" was a forbidden word in the house.

Madame Clermont de Sazy was seated some distance from me, for the dinner-party numbered

thirty; but whilst conversing with her granddaughter, my neighbour at the foot of the table, I kept watching the look of mournful irony which was her customary expression.

Later on, when the couples of the dinner-table drifted apart in the drawing-room, I manœuvred so as to isolate my hostess near the fireplace. To her I was a young friend of her grandchildren, and she seemed much surprised by my attentions, but amused. She made me sit down beside her, and after some commonplace remarks I said:

"I spent this afternoon, Madame, with somebody for whom I cherish a great affection and who talks of you with an admiration which would, I think, have touched you."

"With admiration! Of me! Really?" she said. "And who is this, so late in the day?"

"Edmond Neuville, Madame. . . . You remember—the former ambassador, the friend of Edward VII. . . ."

She flushed, but showed keen interest.

"Neuville! Talking about me! What did he say? You know, I can't have set eyes on him for——" She thought for a moment—"for over forty years."

"So he told me, Madame."

A Misunderstanding

"But did he say why? Did he tell you our story?"

"No. But I will confess, Madame, that the few words he spoke, and the tone in which he said them, made me curious to know it."

She glanced anxiously over my head at her husband, who was showing off a Fragonard to the Minister of Finance, and beyond, at a group of men who were engaged in a loud argument and had been overlooked in passing round the cigars.

"Oh, I don't know why I used the word 'story,'" she said. "There was no 'story.' And what became of Neuville? So long as he was an ambassador it was not particularly surprising never to meet him in society here. . . . But when I heard that he had retired from diplomacy, I expected to. . . . How is he?"

"Well, Madame, he is very ill. . . . His doctor says that he may live two or three months longer, but no more."

"How dreadful!" she said. "I didn't know about that. Do you see him often? Listen. . . . Tell him. . . ."

She paused, leaving the words in mid-air.

"No," she went on. "It is all so long ago, and so forgotten, that I don't know how a message

from me would affect him. . . . But please try to find out what his feelings towards me are. . . . Come and let me know. But now, please excuse me—I must see to my guests. . . .”

.

When I saw M. Neuville again next day, I told him of this conversation, and saw, perhaps for the first time, a trace of emotion in one who was usually cold and aloof. I pressed him to tell me about Madame Clermont de Sazy, and this was his story:

“You know that throughout a great part of my life I was styled, in the horrible phrase of the time, a ‘lady-killer.’ I can talk of that now without vanity, because I am old and near the grave, and also because I never understood women myself. My career took me to most of the great European capitals, and in each of them I became attached to women conspicuous for their charm and spirit. . . . Nothing else interested me, except perhaps horses and my profession. Perhaps it was because they realized the importance of love in my life that so many women responded by showing me kindness. A strange thing—the glamour and boldness engendered by love! The purest, the most chaste of

A Misunderstanding

women are not unresponsive to it. Several times, in Sweden, in Austria, in Russia, young women fell in love with me and, to try to marry me, committed countless follies, which to-day would pass as small-change, but in those days were very courageous. . . . For my own part, I held aloof from marriage in the way natural to a young man whose freedom brings him a continual procession of delights.

“I was thirty-eight, and first secretary in Vienna, when I happened to be spending a few days in the country with an Austrian family—the Breitenbergs. There I met a young French girl who had come to teach the Count’s daughters French and music. From the first evening, when she appeared at the dinner-table between her two pupils, she made an extraordinary impression on me. Prettier women I might have known, but none more pleasing. Remember, a woman had to be very beautiful indeed to appear so then in a Viennese house. The Countess was famous amongst Austrian women for the glory of her golden-brown hair and the slimness of her figure, and her daughters were like her; one of their friends, a Hungarian, had those black eyes with oriental depths, that supple body, at once vigorous and womanly, which is rarely to

be found outside that admirable country. But the young woman in the white dress, sitting unjewelled at the foot of the table, outshone them all by her air of fine pride and inimitable simplicity. After dinner I got her to talk. Her freshness and frankness, the grace of her bearing and gestures, instantly banished from my mind all my fairest mistresses of that time.

"This girl whom I admired so much bore a name which then seemed to me the loveliest in the world, and which I still love—*Béatrice de Vaulges*. I had known her grandmother, the *Marquise de Vaulges*, for she came of a very good family in *Picardy*, poor and forced to earn her living, but excellently brought up.

"Next day I asked whether I might ride with the young Countesses. *Mademoiselle de Vaulges* accompanied them. She sat her horse superbly.—Look! That is how I was dressed that morning—in that portrait!—Well, well, I did my best to please, and I fancied I was succeeding. We spoke of that charming city, which we both loved. *Vienna* then was a paradise. The Emperor *Francis Joseph*, still a young sovereign, had softened the rigours of the most stupid police of the older Europe. Morals were easy, love was counted a

A Misunderstanding

virtue. Those were the days when the little Viennese news-sheets said that you could without hesitation accost any young girl coming out from *La Belle Hélène*. The 'golden Sundays' were followed by 'blue Mondays' and 'green Tuesdays.' Mademoiselle de Vulges told me that her time was quite taken up by her pupils, and so she only caught glimpses of these extravagances; but she admired the youthful Empress, her Spanish thoroughbreds, her headlong gallops, the music which bathed Viennese life, the humorous kindliness of her people.

"After luncheon she went with the Breitenberg girls to feed the swans on the lake. I went too. The gleaming white of those three dresses, matching that of the swans, and standing out against the dark water of the pool is still one of the perfect memories that I conjure up when I wish to beautify my latter days.

"During the next winter I was a constant visitor to the Breitenberg Palace. Vienna declared that I was in love with the Countess, but I was in love with her children's governess. To the great surprise of a man accustomed to swift, almost mechanical triumphs, this love was luckless. Back in Vienna, Mademoiselle de Vulges dropped the con-

fidential tone of our first encounter. Within the solemn walls of the Breitenberg Palace, manned with its regiment of footmen, she had no freedom, and if I tried to see her elsewhere, she declined or evaded me.

"Even on Vienna's gay Sundays I could not manage to take her out on to one of those hills where Nature seems to be eternally rehearsing Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. To catch a glimpse of her I went to hear Mass in the Imperial Chapel, which was that of the Breitenbergs, and where the Countess sometimes sang the *Gloria* or the *Sanctus*. Fur-capped guards stood before the altar. The choir of boyish voices was a marvel. Sometimes, in a gallery, I could just see Mademoiselle de Vaulges's profile, and the music then plunged me into mystic contemplation. I enjoyed the very Viennese atmosphere of the Chapel's congregation coming out into the courtyard of the Hofburg, where comments on the singing were mingled with devout remarks and whispered assignations. But Mademoiselle de Vaulges stuck close to her pupils, and slipped away at once if I greeted her. I invited her to a concert. She replied that she could not let herself be seen there with me. Life had taught me to have small belief in women's

virtue. I thought that this one was afraid of losing her situation.

“An opportunity came of seeing her again and having quite a long talk when the winter weather hardened and all Vienna met on the ice. At night there was skating by torchlight—and a delicious spectacle that was! Hungarians in short frogged jackets and fur caps; officers in uniform; women whose long veils streamed backward in the wind, gliding amongst the elongated reflections of the torches. The Breitenbergs had brought Mademoiselle de Vaulges with them. She was a wonderful skater, and told me that she had acquired her skill on the ponds round Amiens. I helped to call up memories of that landscape of flooded meadows, scored across by long rows of willows. She accepted the support of my arm. One day I whispered in her ear that I had a pleasant and discreet apartment in a secluded street, the Metternichgasse. She gave me such an indignant look that I began to doubt the possibility of making her my mistress. The futility of my efforts to obtain even an out-of-doors assignation finally convinced me that her resistance was genuine.

“My temperament used always to lead me to extreme measures. After observing Mademoiselle

de Vulges for a few weeks longer, I realized that she was the only woman I had ever wished to marry. The decision I took will seem to you rapid and, in a youthful cynic, astonishing. She was not so foolish. As I told you, I knew the Vulges, a model family. I was beginning to tire of a libertine life. I was rich and had no reason to worry about lack of money on her side. Obviously Mademoiselle de Vulges would have been in an embarrassing position if she had found herself in Vienna as the wife of a diplomat, amongst people who had known her in a very different status, but I anticipated no difficulty in arranging a transfer to another post; and in any other city her birth, as well as her education, could leave no doubt as to her welcome. In the end I resolved to wait no longer, and without using friends or relatives to convey my desires (as the custom then was), I seized the chance of the first day when I could talk to her alone and set forth my intentions. I confess that I had no doubts of how she would respond, for I had all the fatuousness of a man who had never met with opposition, and who now, for the first time, was offering a woman the chance of sharing his life.

“Mademoiselle de Vulges seemed surprised and

A Misunderstanding

moved, and asked for time to think it over. I can still remember my own emotion. I could not work. All day long I sat staring at the door of my room, waiting for a messenger who never came. At night I reproached myself for this anxiety. How and why would she have refused? No doubt she had wanted to write home, to her family in France, and was simply awaiting their reply.

“A few days later she sent me at the Embassy a short, almost harsh, note, telling me that, although grateful for my offer, she could not marry me. When I tried to see her again I found that she had left the Breitenbergs and returned to France. Well, I admit that now I was both stupefied and wretched. It was Goethe, I think, who said: ‘It is painful to be for ever searching, but still more painful to find and to have to abandon.’ For the first time I had met a woman who seemed in my eyes to be the Sylph (as M. de Chateaubriand said), with whom every man longs to spend his earthly life. Perhaps I was wrong, but the illusion was obstinate, and all the stronger in its hold as its fancied perfection was untroubled by any reality. And this woman, whom I had chosen from amongst so many, was the one who had taken to flight from me.

“The adventure filled my thoughts for a long

time. Residence in Vienna became so intolerable to me that I asked to be transferred elsewhere, and it was then that I left for Russia. There, of course, time, a total change of scene and setting, and Maria Pavlovna—whose portrait you were looking at just now—did their work. But I did not forget. And to be frank, my young friend, I have not forgotten to this day. It is forty-seven years since I saw that face, but it lives in my mind, as clear as ever. . . . When you see her again, take a good look at her, and tell me whether her nostrils still have that slight curve, so bold and finely chiselled, which I admired in La Tour's portrait of her ancestress, the Marquise de Vaulges, at Saint-Quentin.

"The adventure left me rather spiteful, and more invulnerable than ever. Some years later I heard that Mademoiselle de Vaulges had married Henri Clermont—who was still plain Clermont, not having then bought the property of Sazy—and the news hurt me all the more as my Sylph seemed to be marrying for money. I—I never married. And it was certainly on account of her. . . . Not that I ever took any romantic, consciously binding vow—no, it was nothing like that. But all my life long, whenever the opportunity of marriage occurred, I instinctively drew com-

A Misunderstanding

parisons between the girl or young woman whom I could choose, and my image of Béatrice de Vaulges; and every time I decided to remain unattached. As for Béatrice Clermont, I was constantly at pains not to meet her, and succeeded in never seeing her again—chiefly, I think, because I was so seldom in Paris. There you are. . . . And now, please tell me what you thought of her last night.”

I described as well as I could the old lady's beauty.

“Yes,” he said, “even then she had those eyes you describe—fond, kind eyes. But their kindness was deceptive. . . . Still, I should like to see them again.”

I confessed that I had mentioned him to Madame Clermont de Sazy.

“Oh?” he said, with interest. “What did she say?”

“She said she hadn't seen you for over forty years.”

“True, true. . . . And what else?”

“She asked me to try and find out what your feelings now are towards her.”

“Well, tell her . . . tell her that they are very much what they were on January 12th, 1861,

before a big log-fire in the drawing-room of the Breitenberg Palace."

.

Next day, of course, I paid a visit to Madame Clermont de Sazy, to bring her this next chapter in the story. She listened without interrupting me, and then, when I had finished, she exclaimed:

"Oh dear! How strange life is!"

"Yes," I said. "I must confess that I should never have believed that a man—especially a man like Monsieur Neuville, could have remained faithful for forty-seven years to the memory of a young girl whom he had only seen a few times. . . . But would it be indiscreet, Madame, to ask, in my turn, what were *your* feelings in 1860 towards Edmond Neuville? Of course, you didn't love him?"

"Oh!" she cried. "But I loved him to distraction!"

And after a moment's thought she added, with a smile:

"And I still love him. . . ."

"But then—why . . .?"

"Because at that time I did not for a moment believe that his offer was serious. . . . No, no . . . just think—why should I believe so? I knew

A Misunderstanding

M. Neuville's reputation, his love affairs. . . . When he first came to the Breitenbergs', Coun. Breitenberg said: 'He's a dangerous man. . . .' When he suggested taking me to a concert, I thought he was trying to compromise me and make me his mistress. . . . When he spoke so directly and bluntly about my marrying him—remember that in those days proposals were always made through parents—I thought that some cruel trick was on foot, or perhaps some ingenuous device for dazzling a poor young governess, and so, to avoid being tempted by one who charmed me beyond words, I just fled. . . . Some years later I met my husband. Naturally, I can't talk about him. . . . But you must have noticed many things, as you seem to be interested in human beings. . . . And now you tell me that it is because of me that Neuville never married. . . . Oh, how clumsily life works! Sixty years gone, at the mercy of a moment's mistake, a glance misunderstood, a word. . . ."

I then told her that Monsieur Neuville had more or less asked me to invite her to come and see him.

"I think you ought to accept, Madame. He has not long to live. . . . Don't you feel it would be satisfying, and rather desirable, that the mis-

Ricochets

understanding which has spoilt the loves of you both should be put straight in the last days of one? ”

She made no reply and fell into a brown study.

“I do not agree,” she said at last. . . . “No: the memory must not be replaced by this old face, so very unlike it. . . . Do not hurt your friend. Tell him that I am ill and am kept indoors, that perhaps next week. . . .”

But next week M. Neuville died, and so they never met again.
